

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESIS ニューズ

境界線 上の ホライゾン IV

下

GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンⅣ(下)

伊達、最上、上越露西亜へ外交官として赴いた武蔵アリアガスト教団院のメンバー達。だがそれを幸制するため、羽柴・秀次率いる戦国外交艦“家康軍”を先頭に羽柴勢が水戸領地に対し戦艦を開始。一方、武蔵では、生徒会と総長連合に対し、平和を求めて大久保・忠勝を代表とする委員長達が蜂起し、内部に潜入した伊佐、穴山ら真田十勇士は、艦の破壊工作の準備を進めていた。

まさに内憂外患の武蔵は、この状況を打開し、東北・上越への活路を開くことができるのか?

各国に分割統治された中世の神州・日本を舞台に繰り広げる、壮大な戦国学園ファンタジー、第四話ついに完結!



川上 稔

か-5-39

GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンⅣ(下)

川上 稔

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The 1st GENESIS



おしるふ
川上 稔

1975年1月3生まれ。東京出身。アニメの交際に向けて執筆作業中。アニメのBD/DVD限定版の特典用書き下ろし小説として本編の一年前の物語を浅黒主人公で進めており、現在、寝られる椅子を捜索中。

【電撃文庫作品】

都市シリーズ

パンツァーボリス1935

エアリアルシティ

風永街都 香港(上)(下)

森楽都市 OSAKA(上)(下)

閉鎖都市 巴里(上)(下)

機甲都市 柏林1〜5

電洞都市 DT(上)(下)

AHEADシリーズ

終わりのクロニクル①〜⑦

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上のホライゾン 1〜Ⅲ

境界線上のホライゾンⅣ(上)(中)(下)

【電撃の単行本】

連射王(上)(下)

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栃木育ち「すっぱっ鹿鹿」しました。みたらし図子めいしいです!こりゑあスッパ(裏)バウンドが載しそうですな一。

カバー/監印

horizon

on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.04





Installation

installation

■伊達・政宗■

もう、何を今更という感じのメジャー大名。
自分ら世代では大河ドラマで「いとうない！」とか
「いかり屋さんの左目」でしょうが。
史実では戦国末期の生まれというが、1567年に出生しています。
だから、十五、六歳の頃に信長が豊前(1582年)されて、
日本が秀吉の天下となっていってしまう訳ですね。
政宗の鎌倉参勤は1584年ですが、
対する秀吉は1585年には豊前となり、1590年には天下統一、
政宗が東北の雄とはいえ、その能力を発揮する前に
天下逐りのレースは勝負がついていた訳です。

なお、生涯勝率は六割前後で、
これは大名全体から見ると結構高い方です。
ただ、勝率よりも領土拡張を主眼とした織田勢とその後継に比べると、
東北の地の不利や、周辺大名が強豪過ぎました。
若手である政宗が、彼らに対してこれだけの勝率を稼いだだけでも
才覚があったものと自分は思っています。
つーか、お隣の最上さん軍が強すぎて、
嫌がらせに近い状態なんですけど……。

作中では双子の弟として小次郎がいる。
雷神の力を受け継いだ少女です。
弟の身体が弱く、青竜の本体が弟の方にあるため、
後継自体に異議は無く、
聖遺支配のあまり及ばぬ土地ということもあっての女性襲名。
剣や政治を学び、三年次からの活躍が見込まれる若手ホープ、
というキャラクターで考えています。
喋りが少し男っぽいですが、自分の襲名元を考えていることで、
己の性別については「無い」ものとして考えています。
総長としてはやや背が低いので(史実の政宗も160cmほど)
見た目の迫力つくかな、と髪を伸ばしています。
角もあって、流髪が重なりやすくなってきたなー、とか感じる風味。
成実や竜崎、片倉達という先輩格の補佐を受けて丁度だけど、
皆が期待を寄せていて、それに応えていける「後継」役ですね。
(川上健)

installation

installation



installation

Date Masamune

He's such a major daimyo you're probably wondering why it took this long to get to him.

In the Taiga drama of my generation, he's probably known for "It doesn't hurt!" and Ikariya-san's Sagetsu.

Historically, he was born toward the end of the Warring States period. That is, in 1567.

So he was only fifteen or sixteen when Nobunaga was assassinated (1582) and Japan was already falling under Hideyoshi's rule.

Masamune inherited the clan in 1584, but Hideyoshi became the imperial advisor in 1585 and ruled Japan by 1590.

While Masamune was a great hero of Tohoku, the race to conquer Japan was already over by the time he could show his true ability.

Now, his lifetime victory rate was around 60% which is quite high compared to the other daimyo.

But when compared to the Oda forces and their successors who focused more on territorial expansion than victory rate, the land of Tohoku put him at a disadvantage and he had far too many powerful daimyo in the region.

Masamune was young, so I think it shows he was very talented that he earned such a high victory rate against them.

I mean, Mogami was so powerful it almost feels like harassment to place them right next door to him...

In the novels, Masamune is a girl who has inherited the power of the Dragon God and has a twin brother named Kojirou.

Due to her brother's weak body and the Seiryu sticking with her, no one could protest her inheriting the clan. This meant the Testament Union had almost no

control over her land.

I thought of her as a young hope who was learning sword fighting and politics in order to start playing a real role in the third year.

She speaks in a somewhat masculine way, but that's due to the source of her inherited name and the fact that she thinks of herself as "genderless".

She's fairly short for a Chancellor (even the historical Masamune was only about 160 cm), so I made her hair longer thinking it would give more impact to her appearance, but now I wonder if washing her hair is hard with the horn and all.

She is supported by her upperclassmen like Narumi, Oniniwa, and Katakura, but she is also the kind of underclassman who works to live up to everyone's expectations of her.

(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 4C**



——大丈夫だ。
俺に任せとけ。

IV


下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—It's okay. Just leave it to me.

Characters



名: マルフア・ボレツカヤ

属: 春日山宮殿ノヴゴロド校

役: 元副長

種: 全方位武術師

特: 女市長

chara

The background of the page is a stylized illustration of a character with blonde hair, red eyes, and a white helmet with a visor. The character is wearing a dark purple scarf and a white and black outfit with yellow accents. The background features a dark, rocky landscape with some white flowers and a large, stylized white outline of a character's head on the right side.

2 character

2

名: 本庄・繁長

属: 春日山宮殿

役: 第二特務

種: 近接武術師

特: である女

Name: Marfa Boretskaya

Faction: Kasuga Gora Kremlin Novgorod Academy

Position: Former Vice Chancellor

Style: Strike Master

Special: Mayoress

Name: Honjou Shigenaga

Faction: Kasuga Gora Kremlin

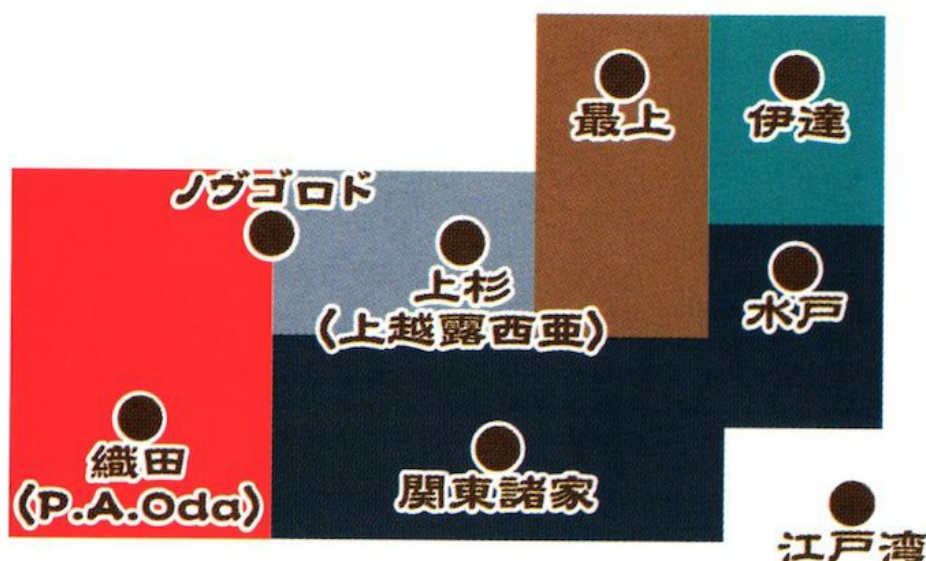
Position: 2nd Special Duty Officer

Style: Strike Forcer

Special: Formal Speaker

World

・『上杉家と露西亞』・



上杉家と露西亞の合一、上越露西亞は極東中央北部を治める大勢力である。

上杉家は元々が公家であったが、鎌倉幕府將軍の従者として関東に降り、関東を管理する武家となった。

上杉家は戦神とも言われた上杉・謙信の跡目争い

“お館の乱”を越え、反勢力となった

上杉・景虎が死亡、
内部の刷新を行いながら、
新当主である上杉・景勝の
元で勢力拡大を
狙いつつあった。



名: 鮭延

World



4

world

一方の露西亜は、皇帝を名乗った
“雷帝” イヴァン四世の元、

彼の強権と強引な
手段をもって
極寒の地を開拓し、
他国と比肩する
ための絶対王政の道を
つけつつあった。

その中で自由貿易都市を
謳うノヴゴロドは肅正
されたのである。

（必見ぞ？）

（大事ぞ？）

名： 最上・義光

Uesugi Clan and Russia

Map:

Upper right: Date Upper left: Mogami Middle right: Mito Upper middle: Uesugi (Sviet Rus) Upper left: Novgorod Lower middle: Kantou Clans Lower right: Edo Bay Lower left: Oda (P.A. Oda)

Sviet Rus, a combination of the Uesugi clan and Russia, is a major power that rules the center of the northern Far East. The Uesugi clan was originally a noble clan, but they moved to Kantou as a servant of the Kamakura Shogunate's shogun and became the samurai clan in charge of Kantou.

After the death of Uesugi Kenshin, who was said to be a war god, the Uesugi clan overcame the siege of Otate, dealt with the death of Uesugi Kagetora who opposed them, and underwent an internal reform. From there, the new leader of Kagetora Kagekatsu worked to expand their power. ← **Important**

Name: Shakenobe

Meanwhile, Russia was ruled by Ivan the Terrible who named himself emperor. Thanks to his powerful rule and forceful methods the frigid land was developed and they paved the way toward an absolute monarchy ← **A Must See** to remain on equal footing with the other nations.

During this time, the free trading city of Novgorod was purged.

Name: Mogami Yoshiaki

Ookubo

特設

太久保様 政見頁



臨時生徒総会について



・CAN『では今回の臨時生徒総会の内容について私、加納が、太久保様からいろいろな情報を引き出してみたいと思います』



・太久保『こんにちは。臨時生徒総会では副会長側と討論を行い、お互いの利点と欠点を示し合い、どちらが有利かを示すことになります』



・CAN『なるほど、その内容は「ひ・み・つ」、ということですね。——ちょっと無理に言ってみました。御嬢様、無理に微笑しなくていいです。ともあれそうなるこのページの実在意義に関わる気もしますので、別の議題について御願い致します。市民の方々から頂いた社会の不満への解決ですね』



・太久保『Jud、では、まず質問の多かった件ですが
痴漢は死刑です』



・CAN『死刑ですか。お触り一発死。これはまた大きく出ましたね御嬢様。この加納、御嬢様の決断と正義感に少々脱帽です。
では、別件の方ですが——』



・太久保『Jud、**覗きも死刑**でいいでしょう。痴漢の罪が相対的に軽くなってしまうというならば、
あっちは消滅刑で』



・CAN『ついでに、という感じですね御嬢様！お触り一発現世から消滅！
というか、正直、面倒になってきてませんか御嬢様！』

管理人紹介



風紀委員長をやってます。
不慣れなのでときたま
極刑にしようときや
誤刑にしようときも
ありますが、気にせず
頑張ります。

記事の分類

- ・御嬢様(1156)
- ・風紀委員(541)
 - ・執行(292)
- ・誤執行判明(384)
 - ・ガーン(384)
 - ・ドンマイ(384)
- ・生きてました(384)
- ・問題なし(384)
- ・きちんと再執行(384)

有用なリンク

- ・聖連”明日の我が身”
- ・武蔵艦橋広報部
- ・代表委員窓口
- ・生徒会だぎゃあああ！
- ・風紀委員会突撃部
- ・酒井学長「いい加減」
- ・失脚から起業しました



Top: Special Page – Ookubo-sama's Political Views

About the Special Student General Assembly

CAN: "Now, then. I, Kanou, would like to retrieve a variety of information from Ookubo-sama on the special student general assembly."

Ookubo: "Hello. During this special student general assembly, I will debate the Vice President, we will point out the pros and cons of each other's plans, and we will determine whose plan is better."

CAN: "I see. And I assume your plan is 'Top☆Secret'? ...Sorry, I went too far there. Milady, there is no need to force a smile. Anyway, that does seem to render this page pointless, so let's discuss some other topics. For example, some solutions to the complaints the citizens have shared with us."

Ookubo: "Judge. I'll start with one of the most common questions: MOLESTERS SHALL BE EXECUTED."

CAN: "Executed, you say? One touch and their life is forfeit. That is a very bold position, milady. I take my hat off to your resolve and sense of justice. Now, as for the next topic..."

Ookubo: "Judge. PEEPING TOMS SHALL ALSO BE EXECUTED. And since this crime seems light when compared to molestation, that one can be bumped up to UTTER ANNIHILATION."

CAN: "I love the way that sounds so much like an afterthought, milady! One touch and they are annihilated from the world of the living! But won't that be a lot trouble for us, milady!?"

Administrator Profile

I am the Public Morals Committee Head.

Since I am still not used to the job, I sometimes jump to the death sentence too quickly and sometimes punish people in error, but I refuse to let it get to me and I continue working to do my very best.

Article Categories

- Milady (1156)
- Public Morals Committee (541)
- Punishments (292)
- Apologies for Mistaken Punishments (384)
- Shock (384)
- Don't Let it Get to You (384)
- Oh, Good. They Survived (384)
- False Alarm (384)
- Time For the Proper Punishment (384)

Useful Links

- Testament Union: Myself Tomorrow
- Musashi Bridge PR Team
- Representative Council Contact Point
- We're the Student Counciliiiiiiiii
- Principal Sakai's Irresponsibility
- I Started a Business after being Overthrown

Far Eastern History

極東史

始めに

初心に戻って歴史上の偉人達を見直すと
どいつもこいつもテンション上級者であることを
学んだり諦める助けになれば幸いだったり



IV<下>

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第七十四章『終わり場の見者』	……P343	最終章『新しき場所の宿り者達』	……P975
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第七十八章『狩り場の証明者』	……P461	用語解説	……P13
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第八十二章『王道の通過者』	……P575	カバーデザイン：渡辺宏一 (2725 Inc)	
第八十三章『離れ場の試練者』	……P597	本文デザイン原案：TENKY	

First of all

When we look back at the great historical figures with none of our preconceptions

We will learn they were all experts at brimming with energy

Hopefully, learning this will be of some help

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Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY) Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Book Design Concept: TENKY

Characters

● 武蔵

 <p>葵・喜美 トリーの姉でエロとダンスの神を信仰する。基本的に高圧で応用的に身勝手。</p>	 <p>葵・トリー 主人公。武蔵アリアダスト学院の総長兼生徒会長。“不可能男”。</p>
 <p>浅間・智 武蔵の主社である浅間神社の娘。トリーや喜美の幼馴染み兼人生の被害者。</p>	 <p>東 帝の子供で半神。能力など全て封じられて武蔵で生活する。</p>
 <p>アデーレ・バルフェット 仏蘭西から流れてきた従士家系。眼鏡娘。</p>	 <p>伊藤・健児 快活なインキュバス。全裸で禿のマッスル系。通称トケン。</p>
 <p>御広敷・銀二 ハート様系体格の食通でオタク。</p>	 <p>キヨナリ・ウルキアガ 第二特務。航空系半竜で異端審問官志望。通称ウッキー。</p>
 <p>シロジロ・ベルトーニ 会計。武蔵の商工会の若手幹部。</p>	 <p>点蔵・クロスユナイト 第一特務。いつも帽子などで顔を隠す忍者で使い走り。</p>
 <p>トゥーサン・ネシンバラ 書記。歴史好きの作家志望者で同人作家。</p>	 <p>直政 第六特務。機関部で働く姉御。煙草はふかすわデカイ声で笑うわで。</p>
 <p>ネイト・ミツダイラ 第五特務。水戸松平の襲名者で騎士家系。人狼ハーフ。</p>	 <p>ネンジ HP3くらいのスライム。男らしい。</p>
 <p>ノリキ 家族を支える勤労少年。不器用型格闘家。無口で無愛想。</p>	 <p>ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー 会計補佐。シロジロのパートナーで白狐エリマキつき。</p>
 <p>ハッサン・フルブシ カルピスマーク系インド人。カレーだけ食って飲んで生きてる。</p>	 <p>ペルソナ君 バケツヘルムの超マッチョ。無口で怪力で心優しい。</p>
 <p>ホライゾン・アリアダスト トリーの幼馴染みで現三河君主。現在自動人形中。感情が大罪武装の部品として奪われている。</p>	 <p>本多・二代 元三河の学生。本多・忠勝の息女。自称拙者、御座る語尾の濃い目。</p>
 <p>本多・正純 副会長。昨年度の三河からの真面目転入生。いろいろ家庭の事情あり。</p>	 <p>マルガ・ナルゼ 第四特務。黒髪六枚翼の白魔術師。漫研所属。</p>
 <p>マルゴット・ナイト 第三特務。金髪六枚翼の黒魔術師。笑顔の方。</p>	<p>ミリアム・ポークウ 車椅子生活のため、在宅就学している少女。</p>
 <p>向井・鈴 目が見えないけど頑張る少女。皆のストッパー。</p>	 <p>立花・宗茂 元三征西班牙第一特務。アモーレ。現在は襲名解除で再起願中。</p>
 <p>立花・間 元三征西班牙第三特務。宗茂の嫁で砲撃系義腕少女。五十回。</p>	 <p>メアリ・スチュアート 英国女王エリザベスの異母姉。金髪巨乳。点蔵の未来嫁として同居中。王賜剣一型のオーナー。</p>
<p>三科・大 機関部部長の孫娘。メカ好き。直政の後輩にあたる。“だい”じゃなくて“ひろ”。</p>	<p>三科・翔一 三科・大の父。泰造の義理の息子。関東IZUMOの長。</p>
 <p>里見・義康 里見教導院生徒会長の少女。小さくても泣かない。武神“義”を操る。</p>	<p>大久保・忠隣／長安 極東には珍しい二重襲名の代表委員長。二年。インチキ関西弁。</p>

character

character

●教導院関係者

かのう
加納

大久保の侍女。自動人形。風紀委員長。二年。



オリオトライ・真喜子

高速戦闘型女教師。いつもジャージ。



“武蔵”

武蔵を統括する自動人形で総艦長。辛辣口調がたまありません。



“品川”

武蔵右舷一番艦の艦長式自動人形。“浅草”と同型。



“武蔵野”

武蔵中央前艦の艦長式自動人形。艦橋内の長。鈴やアデーレと親しい。



三要・光紀

三年竹組の担任。オリオトライを先輩と仰ぐ。何か微妙に不幸。



酒井・忠次

武蔵アリアダスト学院学長。昔はかなり出来る人でしたが左遷。



“浅草”

武蔵左舷一番艦の艦長式自動人形。短髪。



“奥多摩”

武蔵中央後艦の艦長式自動人形。酒井の家の雑用もする。



ヨシナオ

六護式仏蘭西から派遣された武蔵王。教導院への否決権と武蔵の管理権を持つ。

●M.H.R.R.



羽柴・藤吉郎

M.H.R.R.副会長。自動人形の猿面少女。おどおどボンバー系。



マティアス

M.H.R.R.旧派の代表。総長兼生徒会長。傀儡楽しいです！



福島・正則

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー1。御座ります語尾を使用する。



オリンピア

インノケンティウスの義姉にして義妹。現教皇総長。



前田・利家

旧派の代表。会計。霊体になっており、妻の“まつ”と日々平穏に中間職。



加藤・清正

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー2。金髪巨乳系で丁寧口調。

●P.A.Oda



佐々・成政

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。ヤンキー系で突撃派。でも几帳面。



不破・光治

P.A.Odaの対上越露西亜現地会計。利家、成政と三人で“三人衆”と呼ばれる。



丹羽・長秀

六天魔軍、五大頂の二番。切り替えの早い舞踏士。



駒姫

最上・義光の娘で、羽柴・秀次の側室。彼女が連座で自害した事が、最上家の反羽柴への引き金となる。



森・長可

P.A.Odaの中で最も雄度が高い好青年。インバクトの瞬間にヘッドが回る。



柴田・勝家

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。体育会系。最近結婚して困りもの。



御市

柴田・勝家の妻。おっとり系バーサーカー。



羽柴・秀次

羽柴の甥。歴史再現では羽柴の怒りをかけて自害する事になる。



佐久間・信盛

艦隊防御陣形を得意とする艦隊司令。実は佐久間の姓を複数襲名。始好き。

character

●伊達家

だて まさむね 伊達・政宗

伊達家の当主。竜神の力を受け継いでいる。伊達家の総長兼生徒会長でもある。

かたくら こじゅうろう 片倉・小十郎

伊達家の副会長。テンション上下が激しいが選択式。

るす まさかげ 留守・政景

伊達家の仙台城管理システム。名字がとにかく紛らわしい。

だて しげざね 伊達・成実

政宗の従弟役。伊達家の副長で、機動殻“不転百足”を使用。余裕あり気味おねーさん風。

おに にわ つなもと 鬼庭・綱元

伊達家の第二特務。鬼型長寿族の武神使い。使用武神は“左月”。

よし ひめ 義姫

政宗の母。鬼型長寿族と人間のハーフ。仙台伊達教導院の学長。

●上越露西亜

マルファ・ボレツカヤ

浮上都市ノヴゴロドを治める女市長の不死系魔神族。

トビー

極東からマルファ麾下になった謎の老人。あまり謎じゃないかも。

なお え かね つぐ 直江・兼継

上越露西亜の副長兼副会長。愛の人。爽やか系。よく踊る。

ほん しょう しげ なが 本庄・繁長

上越露西亜の各地防衛を行う勇将。本庄楯の使い手。

うえ すぎ かげ かつ 上杉・景勝

上杉家の当主にして、上越露西亜の王である“雷帝”イヴアン四世を襲名する魔神族の王。鉄の錫杖と雷撃を用いる。

さい どう とも のぶ 斉藤・朝信

上越露西亜の第一特務の老人。経験によって戦場の流れや敵の動きを読む“鍾馗”。

●最上家

も がみ よし あき 最上・義光

「羽州の狐」と呼ばれる裏切り上等大名。極寒の最上を一代でまとめあげた辣腕。

さけ のべ 鯉延

義光様のフォローをする走狗ですモン!

●他勢力



さる とび さ すけ 猿飛・佐助

真田教導院の十勇士の一番。体術と忍術をこなす。

み よし い さ 三好・伊佐

真田教導院の十勇士の四番。別名は伊佐入道。制御式の武神を扱う少女。

ゆ り かま の すけ 由利・謙之介

真田教導院の十勇士の六番。剣術を得意とする。

オラニエ公ウィレム

阿蘭陀の抵抗総長。通称オラニエ。ノヴゴロドにて武蔵勢に「創世計画」について教えようと言った。



きり がくれ さい そう 霧隠・才蔵

真田教導院の十勇士の二番。風の移動術をこなす。

あな やま こ すけ 穴山・小助

真田教導院の十勇士の五番。人の良さそうな顔の男。忍術をこなす。

ね づ じん ばち 根津・陣八

真田教導院の十勇士の八番。狙撃を得意とする。

character

● Musashi

- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo-style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa.

Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.

- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.

● Academy Officials

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- "Asakusa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first port ship. Short hair.
- "Shinagawa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first starboard ship. Same model as "Asakusa".
- "Okutama": Captain automaton of Musashi's rear central ship. Also takes care of odd jobs at Sakai's home.
- "Musashino": Captain automaton of Musashi's front central ship. Leader on the bridge. Close to Suzu and Adele.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

● **M.H.R.R.**

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.
- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.

● **P.A. Oda**

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Niwa Nagahide: #2 of the Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. A dancer and quick to adapt.
- Hashiba Hidetsugu: Hashiba's nephew. In the history recreation, earns Hashiba's anger and is made to commit suicide.
- Komahime: Mogami Yoshiaki's daughter and Hashiba Hidetsugu's concubine. Her suicide due to guilt by association led to the Mogami clan's anti-Hashiba stance.
- Sakuma Nobumori: Fleet commander who specializes in fleet defense formations. Has actually inherited multiple names with the Sakuma surname. Loves candy.
- Mori Nagayoshi: Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.

● Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Date Narumi: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident elder sister type.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Oniniwa Tsunamoto: 2nd special duty officer of the Date clan. Demonic long-lived god of war pilot. Pilots a god of war named Sagetsu.
- Rusu Masakage: Control system of the Date clan's Sendai Castle. The family name can cause some confusion.^[1]
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half

human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

● Sviet Rus

- Marfa Boretskaya: Female mayor of the floating city Novgorod. An undead demon.
- Honjou Shigenaga: Brave general who defends Sviet Rus's lands. Uses the Honjou Shield.
- Toby: A mysterious old man from the Far East who now works for Marfa. Or maybe it isn't that much of a mystery.
- Uesugi Kagekatsu: Head of the Uesugi clan and demon king who has inherited the name of Sviet Rus's king Ivan the Terrible. Uses a metal staff and lightning attacks.
- Naoe Kanetsugu: Sviet Rus's Vice Chancellor and Treasurer. Man of Love. Refreshing type. Dances a lot.
- Saitou Tomonobu: Elderly Sviet Rus 1st Special Duty Officer. A "Zhong Kui" who can predict the flow of battle and his enemy's movements based on his experience.

● Mogami Clan

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Shakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

● Other

- Sarutobi Sasuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #1. Uses martial arts and ninja techniques.
- Kirigakure Saizou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #2. Uses a wind movement technique.
- Miyoshi Isa: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #4. AKA Isa Nyuudou. Girl who uses a remote-controlled god of war.
- Anayama Kosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #5. Looks like a nice guy. Uses ninja techniques.
- Yuri Kamanosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #6. Specializes in sword

fighting.

- Nezu Jinpachi: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #8. Specializes in sniping.
- William of Orange: Resistance Chancellor of Holland. Normally known as the Prince of Orange. Said he would tell Musashi about the Genesis Project at Novgorod.

Glossary

か行

- ・改易:お家取り潰しのこと。
- ・外燃拝気:自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。
- ・旧派【カトリック】:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。
- ・教導院:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。
- ・教譜:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。
- ・極東:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。
- ・K.P.A.Italia:安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。
- ・賢鉱石、賢水:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。
- ・校則法:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

さ行

- ・暫定議会:武蔵において、生徒会や総長連合、委員会の官僚となる大人達の組織。
- ・清らか大市【サンメルカド】:三征西班牙のブランド。
- ・Shaja【シャージャー】:ムラサイ圏における“了解”の意。本来は勇気を示す語の表音。
- ・Jud.【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】:咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。
- ・重奏世界:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。
- ・重奏統合争乱:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。
- ・重奏領域:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、碎けながら現実側に合一した箇所。
- ・襲名:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。
- ・術式:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。
- ・白砂台座:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。
- ・人工末世:英国の“花園”に末世研究用で作られた地脈の歪みの圧縮。
- ・神格武装:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。
- ・神州:極東のかつての呼び方。
- ・清武田:中国と武田家の合一。

あ行

- ・黒金侍【アイゼンリッター】:M.H.R.R.改派領邦の主企業。
- ・ArchsArt:“大属の芸術”。英国の主企業。
- ・安土城:P.A.Odaが有する巨大航空戦艦。
- ・尼子家:元IZUMOの地。毛利と六護式仏蘭西によって滅亡。
- ・有明:関東IZUMOによる武蔵専用浮きドック。
- ・アルマダの海戦:英国と三征西班牙の間に生じた海戦。三征西班牙が英国上陸を画策したが壊滅する。
- ・出雲産業座(IZUMO):極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。
- ・英国【イングランド】:浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。
- ・ヴェストファーレン条約:三十年戦争などの講和条約。
- ・H.R.R.M.:“神聖騎士団鉄工会”。M.H.R.R.旧派領邦の主企業。
- ・女神万歳【エウロパ】:六護式仏蘭西の主企業。
- ・六護式仏蘭西【エグザゴンフランセーズ】:毛利家+フランスのこと。
- ・王賜剣【エクスカリバー】:一型と二型がある。
- ・ATELL:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。
- ・見下し魔山【エーデルブロッケン】:魔術ブランド。本社所在不明。
- ・M.H.R.R.:羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。
- ・七部六仙道【オアト】:中国の仙道を基礎とした教譜。
- ・奥州:東北地域のこと。東側を伊達家。西側を最上家が治める。
- ・奥州藤原(平泉):奥州の南側にある長寿族の隠れ里。
- ・大返し【おおかえし】:信長暗殺の際、毛利攻めを行っていた羽柴が全軍をとって返した。二〇〇キロほどの道のりを、十日弱で走破したムチャ行軍。
- ・御館の乱【おたてのらん】:上杉家内における謙信死後の跡目相続争い。上杉・景勝と長尾・景虎が争い、景勝が勝利した。

の試作型。

・**三征西班牙【トレスエスパニア】**:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

な行

・**内燃拝気**:自分の中にため込んだ拝気のこと。

・**ノヴゴロド**:露西亜の西端の大商業都市。浮上都市だが、雷帝イヴァン四世の大粛清で死者の都市となった。

は行

・**拝気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**花園**:英国にて作られた人工末世研究用の空間。

・**範鋼**:清のブランド。頑丈だけどやや荒い。

・**P.A.Oda**:織田家+オスマン。

・**非衰退調律進行**:黎明の時代に起きた、聖譜や重奏世界を作った運動。

・**秀次事件**:羽柴の甥にして次代を任されようとしていた、秀次が、羽柴の怒りをかけて自害に追い込まれた事件。理由は不明で、連座によって側室の駒姫までもが自害することになる。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**機械仕掛けの明星【フィーノアルバ】**:K.P.A.Italiaのブランド。発条式を売り物とする。

・**武家諸法度**:松平家が江戸幕府を興した後に発布する法律。武家のあり方を決めたが、一国一城や、跡継ぎ無い場合は改易など、中央集権化を進める内容。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**文禄の役**:羽柴の朝鮮侵攻。第一回目のこと。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拝気を納めること。献納。

ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。

・**上越露西亜【スヴィエートルーシ】**:上杉家+露西亜のこと。

・**聖協**:聖譜協奏派。上越露西亜で独自発展した旧派。

・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖譜顕装**:聖譜の持つ能力を転用するための武装。

・**精霊術**:意志を持った流体とも言える精霊に話し掛け、力を借りる原始的な術式。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制。極東は十八歳卒業制。

た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**大罪武装**:人間の大罪をモチーフに作られた大量破壊武装。

・**ダンハイ**:教譜の一つ。輪廻転生を主軸としている。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**地脈炉**:地脈から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈の変異を起こしやすく、爆発すると数キロ範囲が消滅して不安定化するためTsirhc教譜では禁止。

・**超祝福艦隊**:アルマダ海戦用の三征西班牙の艦隊。最新鋭艦で構成。

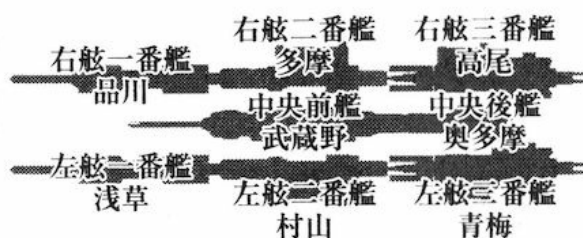
・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。

・**Tes.【テス/テストメント】**:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**通し道歌**:江戸時代に極東に発生する童謡

words

- ・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。
- ・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っている。俗世に干渉しない。
- ・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。
- ・**水戸**:奥州の南、江戸の北。ミツダイラの所領地。
- ・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



- ・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。
- ・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。
- ・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奉する後発派。

ら行

- ・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。
- ・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃排気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。
- ・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。
- ・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。
- ・**竜脈炉**:莫大量の流体を爆発させ、半径数キロを消滅させる爆弾。羽柴が有する。
- ・**黎明の時代**:聖譜成立以前の時代のこと。
- ・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Age of Dawn: The age before the Testament was established.
- Amako clan: Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Anti-Delay Pro-Tuning: The action taken during the Age of Dawn that led to the creation of the Testament and Harmonic World.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt: England's primary corporation.
- Ariake: Floating dock for the Musashi provided by Kantou IZUMO.
- Armada battle: A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- Artificial Apocalypse: A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.
- Avalon: A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.
- Azuchi Castle: P.A. Oda's giant aerial warship.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.
- Bunroku Campaign: Hashiba's invasion of Korea. The first one.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Change of Rank: Having one's clan taken away.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.
- Dragon Line Reactor: A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.
- Dunhi: A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

E

- Edel Brocken: Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Eisenritter: Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.
- Great Return: When Hashiba returned with all his troops while attacking Mouri during Nobunaga's assassination. The rushed march covered about 200 km in less than ten days.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- Hidetsugu Incident: Hidetsugu, Hashiba's nephew who was going to be left in charge during the next generation, earned Hashiba's anger and was forced to commit suicide. The reason is unknown, but his concubine Komahime had to commit suicide with him.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Laws for the Samurai Clans: Laws established after the Matsudaira clan established the Edo Shogunate. It determined the status of the samurai clans, but it centralized power by declaring a 'Change of Rank' if a clan or castle had no heir.
- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mito: South of Oushuu and north of Edo. Mitotsudaira's territory.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

N

- Novgorod: A large trade city on the western end of Russia. It is a floating city, but became a city of the dead after Ivan IV the Terrible's purge.

O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.
- Orthodox: The Orthodox Concerto religion. Sviet Rus's unique branch of Catholicism.
- Oushuu: The Tohoku region. The Date clan rules the east and the Mogami clan rules the west.
- Oushuu Fujiwara (Hiraizumi): A hidden village of the long-lived in southern Oushuu.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing-Takeda: Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- San Mercado: Tres Españan brand.
- Shaja: Used in Mlasi regions and means “understood”. Originally meant “courage”.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO’s shrine brand.
- Siege of Otate: Conflict over the succession of the Uesugi clan after Kenshin’s death. Uesugi Kagekatsu and Nagao Kageatora fought and Kagekatsu won.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion’s basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Spirit Spell: Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy’s domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

World

●●チャット実況通神呼び名一覧●●

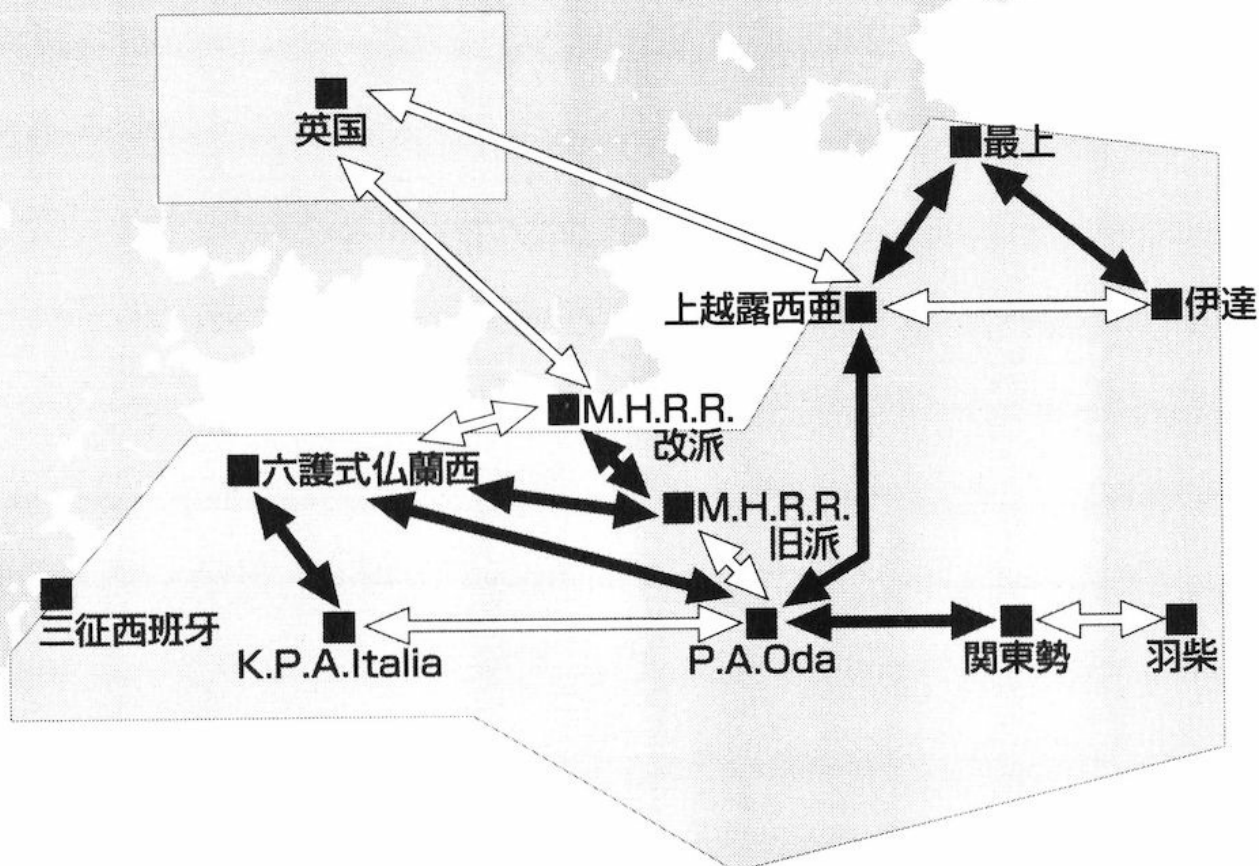
- ・あずま：東
- ・あさま：浅間・智
- ・いんび：伊藤・健児（イトケン）
- ・俺：葵・トーリ
- ・金マル：マルゴット・ナイト
- ・義：里見・義康
- ・傷有り：メアリ・スチュアート
- ・銀狼：ネイト・ミトツダイラ
- ・現役娘：人狼女王
- ・賢姉様：葵・喜美
- ・481：三科・翔一
- ・立花夫：立花・宗茂
- ・立花嫁：立花・闇
- ・煙草女：直政
- ・十Z〇：点蔵・クロスユナイト
- ・蜻蛉切：本多・二代
- ・粘着王：ネンジ
- ・83：ハッサン・フルブシ
- ・貧従士：アデーレ・バルフェット
- ・副会長：本多・正純
- ・ベル：向井・鈴
- ・ホラ子：ホライゾン・アリアダスト
- ・●画：マルガ・ナルゼ
- ・○べ屋：ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー
- ・847：三科・大
- ・未熟者：トゥーサン・ネシンバラ
- ・武蔵王：ヨシナオ
- ・眼鏡：シェイクスピア
- ・礼賛者：御広敷・銀二
- ・労働者：ノリキ
- ・不退転：伊達・成実
- ・景綱君：片倉・小十郎
- ・牙：鬼庭・綱元
- ・留守居：留守・政景
- ・三立申：滝川・一益
- ・大先輩：柴田・勝家
- ・お12：御市
- ・百合花：佐々・成政
- ・お前田：前田・利家
- ・ふわあ：不破・光治
- ・モリー：森・長可
- ・九尾娘：最上・義光
- ・繁子：本庄・繁長
- ・かげV：上杉・景勝
- ・朝の部：斉藤・朝信

4〈中〉の簡易あらすじ

つーか、あれさ。敗戦して気分転換に武蔵を楽しく改造したら伊達がやってくるわ羽柴の十本槍がやってくるわで、反省中の正純がやっぱり戦争しなくなって伊達・最上・上越露西亞と三国会議と思ったら代表委員の大久保が甘クーデターするわ伊達では青竜がハシャぐわで面倒さねー。更にはノヴゴロドで阿蘭陀のオラニエってのが「創世計画バラすから来いよ」って、こっちゃん喜美が二代の復活訓練やったり臨時生徒総会だったりでそれどころじゃないんさね。



●勢力関係図●



■極東 (武蔵)

- 三征西班牙
- K.P.A. Italia
- 英国
- M.H.R.R. 改派
- M.H.R.R. 旧派
- 六護式仏蘭西
- P.A. Oda
- 関東勢

⇄ 協働
→ 敵対

無矢印は放置
または緩い警戒

●今後の武蔵の予定●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 武蔵はこれからどうアバンギャルドになるんだよ!」



「フフフアバ弟。とりあえず三国会議と泰衡の会談の前に、臨時生徒総会で正純が大久保をキャンキャンいわせないとね? その後は会議とかしてノヴゴロドで楽しく戦争よー!」

Simple Summary of 4-C: How should I put this? For a change of pace after our loss, Musashi was having some fun remodeling, but then Date showed up, Hashiba's Ten Spears showed up, and Masazumi tried to mend her ways but ultimately couldn't suppress her warmongering spirit. It looked like we were going to have a three nations meeting with Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus, but then Ookubo of the Representative Committee decided to have a mini coup d'état and the Seiryu decided to have a party at Date. And as if that wasn't trouble enough, this Prince of Orange guy from Holland tells us to visit him in Novgorod because he's going to spill the beans on the Genesis Project, so it's hardly the time for Kimi to be helping Futayo with her training or for a special student general assembly.

Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi
- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin
- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji
- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi

- Bell: Mukai Suzu
- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mal-Ga: Malga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki
- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu
- Great Upperclassmen: Shibata Katsuie
- O12: Oichi
- Lily Flower: Sassa Narimasa
- Omaeda: Maeda Toshiie
- Fuwaa: Fuwa Mitsuharu
- Mory: Mori Nagayoshi
- KageV: Uesugi Kagekatsu
- Tomo-no-Bu: Saitou Tomonobu

Far Eastern Powers: [Same map as in 3-A.]

Relationships Between the Major Powers: [Same as 4-A]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! What kind of avant garde stuff is Musashi going to do now!?

Kimi: Heh heh. Avant brother, before the three nations meeting and the further discussions with Yasuhira, Masazumi has to show Ookubo who's boss at

the special student general assembly. After that, we have our meeting and a fun war in Novgorod!

School Rules

Article 51 Line 1

- The members of the Student Council are ranked higher than the members of the committees (and equivalent organizations).

Article 51 Line 2

- The head of each committee has the right to make suggestions to the Student Council members on matters concerning their committee.

Chapter 62: Distant Supporter

第六十二章

『遠方の応援者』



At all times

And wherever you are

They are worried about you

Point Allocation (Parent)

A white tent was set up between the waves of green, blowing grass on a hilltop.

A woman sipped at a cup below that shadow blocking the sun. The large blonde rolls of her hair were swept back.

“Musashi will have settled on a direction in another hour. Now, what will you two do as Mouri Terumoto and Louis Exiv? As the Reine des Garous under your command, I am very interested in your future plans.”

The Reine des Garous’s question was directed at Terumoto, who wore an Hexagone Française girl’s summer uniform, and Exiv, who wore his summer birthday suit. They looked back at her and Terumoto crossed her arms with a smile and raised eyebrows.

“You want to know what we’re going to do? What can we do besides bring the fight to Hashiba?”

“Terumoto, I love the youthful enthusiasm, but do you have a plan?”

“Testament,” confirmed Terumoto as she looked east.

She looked down the hill, through the woods, and past a distant wheat field, a river, and more woods.

“Wayyyy over there, beyond where it fades into blueness, an aerial transport ship name Tottori Castle controls our front line near the border with M.H.R.R. Are you familiar with that history recreation?”

“Testament. Hashiba besieges the castle for two hundred days and most of the soldiers in the castle starve to death. The lord of the castle attempted to fight back but ended up asking that the survivors be spared if he committed suicide. But Hashiba was impressed by their thorough resistance and attempted

to spare the lord's life to help rule over and negotiate with the region more smoothly. However..."

"The lord stubbornly refused, so Hashiba asked Nobunaga if he could accept the suicide. He received permission, so with the lord's suicide, Hashiba took Tottori Castle as a stronghold for attacking Mouri."

Exiv completed the explanation as Terumoto looked to the east.

The afternoon sun lit up the distant sky, but it was also white and hazy. A deep shadow and a sandstorm covering several dozen kilometers were visible there.

"Tottori Castle sends out a sand barrier along with its accompanying ships to protect Mouri's eastern sky. As a transport ship, the most it can do is put up a long-term defense. ...Mouri-01."

Terumoto's call was answered by a voice in the open-air kitchen a short distance outside the tent.

"Testament. Princess, Mouri-32b is in charge of Tottori Castle and she has enjoyed the past two hundred days very much. After all, she was given a fully mechanical body that allowed her to continue working without eating a thing for those two hundred days. And in that sandy environment, she apparently had all the cleaning work she could ever hope for. The Hashiba forces positioned to the east have apparently been worn down, so Mouri-32b and the others under her command apparently set up shop to supply food for them."

"Those two hundred days will soon be over."

The Reine des Garous nodded at Terumoto's comment.

"P.A. Oda possesses a great fleet, but after spreading their forces over K.P.A. Italia and Kantou, their territory has grown by about 30% and they are left with insufficient ships. If they are to invade Hexagone Française, they would like to take Tottori Castle for its transportation and storage abilities. Of course, to prevent a rebellion of the local people who have been protected by that castle, they would also like for control of the castle to simply be transferred to them."

"That's why we use it as bait." Terumoto looked to the Reine des Garous. "We hand over Tottori Castle unharmed, and in exchange...they let the Reine des

Garous inherit a Far Eastern commander's name."

Which would mean...

"The Reine des Garous would be able to interfere in the Mouri-side battles. That would be Hexagone Française and Mouri's best way to hold Hashiba in check."

"You're unbeatable, Terumoto! Your wisdom is sending a shiver down my spine!"

"You're just chilled because you don't have any clothes on. ...Anyway, we could also make it so you can interfere, but that can wait. Sending the Vice Chancellor to the battlefield provides a better image than sending the Chancellor."

The Reine des Garous smiled thinly at what Terumoto said.

"I more or less understand what you are after. You wish to mess with Hashiba, don't you?"

"It isn't fair to the people taking all this more seriously, but I just can't help but oppose anyone with power. ...Also, we've also received some troubling information."

"What is it? Has *the time I have been waiting for* finally arrived?" The Reine des Garous's smile deepened. "If I do join the fight, Hashiba will not just send an empty Tottori Castle to the front line, will they? You have received some information from a spy while Mouri-32b was running her food stand, didn't you?"

"You wolves have sharp noses."

Terumoto smiled bitterly. She leaned back in her chair and stretched a hand back. Mouri-02 stopped forward and placed a cup of hot milk in her hand.

"Oh, thanks. ...Now, anyway, it's simple. Hashiba is apparently loading supplies onto the Azuchi Castle at Kantou and Edo. This information is from two days ago, so they're probably about done. That means Hashiba will carry those supplies to Tottori Castle while they send the Azuchi Castle back to Lake Biwa to

return it to Nobunaga. But...”

But...

“As they do that, they will apparently be sending supplies to Shibata’s forces.”

Terumoto opened a *signe cadre*. It showed the sky as well as a ghost. The ghost was a black-haired demonic long-lived wearing an M.H.R.R. girl’s summer uniform.

“Tomoe Gozen. ...Any news on the visual confirmation of the western Hashiba forces and eastern Shibata forces?”

“Testament. Hashiba is apparently leaving K.P.A. Italia and returning to P.A. Oda’s headquarters in Lake Biwa’s Azuchi. She is probably visiting Nobunaga to ask about the suicide of Tottori Castle’s lord. As for Shibata’s forces in the east, Shibata’s fleet is deployed south of Novgorod. ...Once they decide to begin, they can quickly advance on Novgorod.”

“What a pain.” Terumoto looked up into the sky. “The Azuchi Castle will be carrying all the supplies peaceful Kantou had stockpiled. They’ll be giving supplies to Shibata’s forces on the way, so Shibata will definitely be able to invade Sviet Rus and Hashiba will definitely be able to attack Mouri. ...This large-scale resupply is a lot of trouble.”

“But Shibata has not yet begun his invasion of Novgorod. If he hasn’t, then that resupply seems of little value.” The Reine des Garous narrowed her eyes and intertwined her fingers. “What do you think will trigger Shibata’s invasion of Novgorod?”

“Sviet Rus or Oushuu cooperating with Musashi.”

Tomoe Gozen answered immediately and Exiv continued for her.

“Sviet Rus and Oushuu cooperating with Matsudaira did not occur until after Nobunaga and Hashiba’s deaths. If that occurs, Hashiba will have to move ahead with Nobunaga’s assassination since they control the Testament Union now. So P.A. Oda will first want to quickly finish all of the history recreation leading to Nobunaga’s assassination so they can rush in to stop it. That is why Hashiba is preparing to attack Mouri and why Shibata is preparing to invade Sviet Rus.”

“An excellent answer.” Tomoe Gozen showed off her sharp canine teeth in a small smile. “Of course, if Sviet Rus or Oushuu are to cooperate with Musashi, the current Student Council must win this special student general assembly and then achieve decent results at the three nations meeting with Sviet Rus, Date, and Mogami. But are you sure you want that, Mouri? ...If Musashi earns Sviet Rus’s cooperation, Hashiba will begin their Mouri invasion in earnest.”

“We have countermeasures in mind. We’ll mess with them good. After all, I’m Mouri Terumoto, the commander who messes with everyone at Sekigahara. Also, Anne already decided at Magdeburg that we would focus on Musashi for our resistance against P.A. Oda. ...And we have no complaints about that.”

“Sorry.”

Tomoe Gozen bowed and Terumoto smiled bitterly.

“Don’t worry about it. This just means everyone’s destiny has yet to be decided.”

Terumoto opened another *signe cadre*. This one was a divine transmission from the Ariake.

“———”

Musashi’s Vice President raised her right hand and said something.

“Good. ...Musashi’s Vice President. Now that’s someone I’d like to face head-on.”

Terumoto raised her eyebrows a little and fixed her eyes on Musashi’s Vice President.

“When I see a girl going on the offensive like that, it makes me feel like they’ve gotten disturbingly far ahead of me.”

Masazumi stood below a vast white ceiling and atop the bridge leading to the academy on the aft end of a giant ship.

She checked some information on a sign frame and breathed in.

She was about to begin tearing down what Ookubo had said.

She would remove all of the complaints Ookubo had made about their goals and methods.

...This won't be easy.

More through intuition than realization, she concluded that Ookubo was fully betting herself on this. Ookubo had two inherited names, yet she was facing down and debating someone with no inherited name while showing no fear of the history recreation of her own fall from grace.

Masazumi silently commented on that stance.

...Ookubo. You take Musashi and the Far East very seriously, don't you?

So do I. Or at least I try to.

She wanted to speak with Ookubo about that.

Of course, that would have to be after all of this was over.

But, thought Masazumi. *Just as a lot went into constructing who I am today, a lot went into who Ookubo is as well.*

What was that “a lot”?

...If I knew that, I bet I could understand what she really wants here and what she's really thinking.

Simply knowing whether or not what Ookubo was saying was real would change Masazumi's trust in the girl's words and actions.

Masazumi wanted to do everything she could as a part of what determined Musashi and the Far East's destiny. While preparing the night before, she had received some information from Ohiroshiki and visited a number of places, but...

...This won't be easy.

She could only say her opponent's defenses were too strict.

Hey, she thought toward the side of Ookubo's face.

What are you thinking as you stand here?

Masazumi formed those words in her heart and took a breath.

“...?”

But then she noticed a sign frame next to her face. She saw Tsukinowa raising both front paws.

“Maa!”

It waved them. That was probably a way of telling her to look as soon as possible, so...

Vice President: “What is this? And why is it protected so only I can read it?”

Four Eyes: “Hi, Musashi Vice President. This is the volunteer working to restore your silly wannabe author.”

...Shakespeare!?

Letters rapidly flew around the target of Masazumi’s question.

She was supposedly in Neshinbara’s home, restoring him from his flattened state, but...

Four Eyes: “I was analyzing the data while working on the restoration and I came across a divine mail summing up the events of the night before last. Basically, it was his notes concerning Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu. ...This boy seems to have a fetish that leads him to go for anyone with glasses, but that doesn’t really matter. No, it does matter. Or maybe if he at least had better taste in them. But, anyway, look.”

Look at what?

Four Eyes: “ ‘The Possibility of Rebellion by Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu and the True Meaning Thereof’ ”

Masazumi was dumbfounded by what this meant and the sign frame continued speaking.

Four Eyes: “Sorry. I was given full privileges over this wannabe idiot, so I should have noticed this sooner and sent it to you. If I had, it would have significantly reduced your stress and given you several hours with which to peacefully work on the creative process you call politics. That was my mistake.

...But may I ask one thing?"

Vice President: "What is it?"

Four Eyes: "Is this enough for you to accept Toussaint's value?"

Vice President: "Judge. ...I was just hoping to learn the truth behind Ookubo. I didn't want to make a mistake in how I responded here. I don't know to what kind of extremes Neshinbara's thought processes took him, but he predicted this would happen, didn't he? And he already investigated the truth behind it."

Honestly.

Vice President: "We might have avoided all this trouble if he hadn't been flattened."

Four Eyes: "I am shocked to find a lacking wannabe author is enough to alter the destiny of an entire nation."

Vice President: "Are you saying we must be severely short-handed?"

Four Eyes: "No. If I am his goal, then he needs to be at least at that level while still only a wannabe. Otherwise, he could never hope to match me in the future."

Masazumi did not entirely understand that, but she recorded it so she could give it to Heidi or Naito later on. Hopefully it would be worth at least the price of a lunch.

But at the same time, relief filled her heart.

Vice President: "What does it say?"

Four Eyes: "I have not read it as Toussaint meant it for you. He may be foolish and lacking and he may have a hopeless penchant for delusions, but...nothing he creates is powerless."

Vice President: "Are you saying this will help me?"

Four Eyes: "Testament. All creative works contain energy. Whether you will consume it or not is up to you, though."

Shakespeare sent the word "bye" and the sign frame vanished. All that remained was a single sign frame showing the information Neshinbara had

sent.

Masazumi thought as she viewed that and let most of its contents enter her mind.

...*Ookubo*.

It contained the truth behind this special student general assembly and a few odd happenings of late.

Masazumi was able to find the answers to what had seemed so inscrutable. She thanked Neshinbara for that sense of relief and turned back toward Oriotorai.

The woman returned her look and raised her eyebrows in interest.

“Sensei. ...Sorry, but please give me a moment to gather the information in my head.”

“Honestly, why do you boys love showing off in front of girls so much?”

In a small room, Shakespeare lay on the bed in her white coat. She started by sprawling out her limbs and grabbing the blanket. Then she rolled up in it and rolled back and forth on the bed.

After a while, she said “testament”, got up, and sighed.

“My sponsor will be releasing me soon, so I will be quite busy as a professional author.”

Her eyes turned toward a wall covered in bookshelves and...

“Toussaint.”

Neshinbara’s armor panel was there with the excess portion cut away.

The corners of Shakespeare’s mouth relaxed and she approached the armor.

“Nn.”

She placed her lips on it and took a breath.

“I thought I could do it while everyone slept, but the preparations to release you are already complete...”

She reached for her collar and undid her inner suit's joint. Then she showed off her teeth in a smile.

"So I can indulge myself just a little for the time being, can't I?"

Once she said that, Shakespeare's long ears suddenly moved. They twitched a few times and she spoke while touching them with her hands.

"What a nice rhythm. ...Is someone dancing up on the western side of the Ariake?"

They were high in the sky.

So high, in fact, that it grew dark blue below and they could not see the bottom. Thin white clouds were spiraling lower down, but none were visible in the blue overhead.

A white panel existed below that blue. It was a vast plain floating above the earth.

The white surface existed on the same scale as the sea, the mountains, the towns, and the forests stretching out below. Its upper surface was printed with the brand name Kantou IZUMO and the name Ariake.

A few things were moving on the Ariake's surface. Most of those on the western side were light gods of war replacing the western armor and defense spell stockers.

The majority were split into three groups.

One group continued working. That was the smallest group.

Another group watched the special student general assembly on the few sign frames opened above the Ariake. That was the largest group.

The last group was gradually growing as the gods of war called out to each other. They were looking to the scaffolding being put together to replace the external armor on the western side. Two people were moving atop the reinforced bamboo pipes.

They were both girls.

The two exchanged positions and moved about while favoring the cut edges of the reinforced bamboo pipes that stood vertically. It looked more like dance practice or a game than it did a battle. Or it would have if the one pursuing the other were not wielding a spear.

Another girl and a woman were watching those two.

On the edge of the deck near the scaffolding, a middle-aged woman wearing a Blue Thunder apron crossed her arms and smiled as she asked a question of the girl in a summer uniform standing next to her.

“Tomo-chan, how much support are you providing as the Asama Shrine?”

Asama did not understand what that question meant at first.

“Are you talking about Kimi and Futayo’s training or the special student general assembly, Toori-kun and Kimi’s mother?”

Yoshiki smiled bitterly and answered without looking Asama’s way.

“I’m talking about both. You’re pretty strongly in my kids’ camp, Tomo-chan, and you’re also in their friends’ and allies’ camp. And you don’t hold back in either case, do you?”

“When you put it like that, I can only say that’s due to my personality...”

“Judge. So take care of Toori. There are other girls, including Horizon, but if that idiot’s prepared to be a king, then he needs to start looking to the next stage before long.”

“What do you mean by the next stage?”

“Judge,” Yoshiki nodded and looked to Kimi’s hair dancing and Futayo’s hair flying in pursuit atop the scaffolding. “Futayo-chan is pretty flexible. I thought she would move more stiffly. ...Kimi is always wiggling around, but she bends pretty far when you go along with it, Tomo-chan.”

“If I get out of shape and can’t do the splits anymore, Kimi always forces me to do it...”

“Ha ha.” Yoshiki laughed. “Anyway, about the next step. It looks to me like

everyone will be able to act like that.”

Listen.

“Musashi became what it is today in order to rescue Horizon, but she’s no longer gone and no longer taken. She is *here* now. She is *with us* now. She works at my place and she lives underground in Tama. She has also become quite active as that idiot’s girlfriend. ...So even if this started with losing Horizon, thinking of our current issues based on that means to deny what we have now.”

“———”

Asama’s pulse began beating faster.

In front of her, Futayo was pursuing Kimi.

According to Yoshiki, the girl had felt her own limits and wished to surpass them.

That desire was likely a reaction to the current state of Musashi and Yoshiki’s next words seemed based on that premise.

“A foundation is important, but it’s just a foothold. What you need to hold in your arms now is a brand new weapon that can break through your obstacles and pave the way forward. And...”

And...

“That idiot is trying to become a king. He’s trying to create a nation, not preserve one. That nation does not yet exist and you could say his future is lawless until it does exist. In that case, anything goes as long as it seems like the best option. So Tomo-chan, take care of my idiot and of Horizon and Kimi too.”

“Oh, come on. I’m still in no position to be taking care of anyone...”

“Judge.” Yoshiki patted her on the back. “I know you can’t say no if I ask you, but I’m asking you anyway. ...Do you know why?”

It was not to increase Asama’s sense of obligation. She knew Yoshiki enough to know that. She knew it all the more because Yoshiki knew her quite well.

Yoshiki was saying this:

...If I ever feel like I'm creating a wall between us, I can use this request as an excuse to follow him regardless...

That woman must have seen right through her. Asama was a shrine maiden and Musashi's Shinto representative, so she could not always act freely. Her role was often that of a supervisor, so it was often hard to know whether or not she should ask for something herself.

"The others are always acting of their own volition," said Yoshiki. "But Tomo-chan, you often have to stop them. You play that role a lot with my two idiots. So feel free to act first and make up your mind later. You said before that you were thinking of traveling around the mainland after graduating, right? Before you decide whether you should do that or not, make sure you won't be leaving behind any regrets. And..."

And...

"Just like Asama-kun and Ei-san, you're as much a part of our family as Horizon. Feel free to follow your heart and go for the answer you like best. I'll root for you, although I'll be rooting for the others too. And if you're going to do that, you'll need to get Horizon on your side."

"U-um, uh..."

Asama asked just to be sure.

"What are we talking about here?"

Yoshiki glanced over at her hesitant question and formed a smile on the corners of her mouth.

"You really are hopeless if someone doesn't ask you to do it. You're just like Ei-san."

Asama did not find it weird when this woman spoke her mother's name. And then Yoshiki patted her on the back.

"So make sure you're also just like her when it comes to the fights that truly matter. I guarantee you'll get the answer you want."

"Um, but, uh..."

"Judge." Yoshiki nodded with a bitter smile. "We're talking about a very

serious issue. ...Now, look over there, Tomo-chan.”

Asama did so and saw a slow change coming over Kimi and Futayo’s movements.

Their movements were growing larger.

Kimi felt a smile on her lips.

...Finally. Yes, finally.

She was finally feeling it. Her movements were starting to take the form of a large dance.

After all, this was training. She needed to “match” her opponent. So she had sealed away her more serious movements until that opponent could keep up.

She was gradually releasing those movements now. She had initially taken up her position on the scaffolding to judge her opponent’s skill, but Futayo’s movements were growing larger and faster.

...But she still has a long way to go.

The girl was simply matching Kimi’s tempo and taking great leaps with a set timing.

Futayo was doing nothing more than repeatedly taking a kind of jump she was unaccustomed to taking. But...

“Good.”

It was like smelling a food one loved. It was like stepping through the door of one’s favorite shop. It was like waking up in the morning and finding that beloved person by one’s side.

Futayo’s movements gave off that hint of greater things to come.

The movements of the dance had seeped into her body.

The order in which she moved her legs and how she swung her body expressed the dance’s theme.

By placing all of those movements into a single current, the dance became

more than just a form of exercise. It was a medium of expression.

This was the same.

Right now, I am waiting even as I continue to flee, thought Kimi.

It was just like a couple chasing after each other at the beach.

It was just like a prince and a princess attempting to take each other's hand at a ball.

It was just like a brother and sister fighting over the snacks they held.

"But my foolish brother gets worn out so easily. Yes."

She was doing more than "continuing to flee". She was also "waiting".

She would occasionally slow the timing of her jump.

But she did more than slow her timing. She would also change direction or adjust her body's movements for the jump after that.

She also never forgot to keep one motion flowing into the next. She would jump, and...

"———"

Futayo jumped and approached. Her footsteps were growing louder. She was beginning to put real strength behind her jumps in order to keep up with Kimi's movements.

She closed the distance between them like that, but she had yet to use any acceleration spells.

Neither had Kimi.

Kimi used the leaping motions as a part of her dance. From a dance-perspective, repeatedly jumping from one end of the stage to the other was a beginner-level skill.

But Futayo seemed unaccustomed to making such long jumps so many times in a row.

Kimi was sending the spring of her body back and forth like a pendulum, but Futayo would build up strength, release it, and then repeat the process.

Kimi knew why. Making such frequent long leaps was unthinkable in a battle. And if Futayo wanted to make these long jumps more easily...

“Heh heh. You know what you have to do, don’t you?”

Kimi narrowed her eyes and looked back toward Futayo.

She saw light behind her. It was ether light, the light that resided in spells. It was...

“Soaring Wings. ...Use that to jump after me with everything you’ve got.”

Futayo activated her spell.

To leap in quick succession, she opened the spell circles for Soaring Wings on her leading toes, knee, and shoulder.

The bluish-white sign frames instantly purified her path forward.

...Judge!

Her body felt lighter. The space before her contained the chill of clear water. She felt like jumping through there would clear everything up.

She pursued Kimi.

She knew Kimi’s jumping technique was based in her dancing skills.

It was a unique technique, but it was still pathetic that a Vice Chancellor of all people had to use a spell to keep up with a non-officer.

“But...”

This was training for her. After deciding to teach her, Yoshiki had set up this time for her.

Futayo decided she would pursue Kimi without worrying about appearances. If Kimi was making leap after leap, then...

...I will keep up by using Soaring Wings’s acceleration to double my own leaps!

So Futayo made accelerated jumps to keep up with Kimi.

A moment later, Futayo saw Kimi crouch down in preparation to jump

backwards. And...

“!?”

Kimi had not done anything, yet Futayo was sent flying into empty air.

“Gin... It would seem the Vice Chancellor has decided to face her battle head-on.”

At the site of the special student general assembly, Muneshige was stationed as a guard at the back end of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s bridge. Gin was stationed halfway up the stairs and he sent her words that only she could hear.

Masazumi had bought herself some short time to gather her thoughts for the special student general assembly.

...This is a duel.

Muneshige understood political topics, but he could not handle them with ease. He had skill in both military and intellectual matters, but he did not think he would focus on the latter until he had pursued the former some more.

So this special student general assembly confrontation felt like combat to him.

There was also the other form of combat occurring behind the scenes.

“What do you think about the Vice Chancellor’s training?”

Gin answered without waiting to nod.

“The problem with her is how she faces everything a little too head-on. Try to use a technique on her and it can easily backfire.”

“Your prosthetics are part of your body and not techniques, so you have nothing to worry about, Gin.”

“Judge. You are saying the daughter of a warrior family should put more effort into cooking and cleaning, aren’t you?”

“That bonito this morning was exquisite. And when you prepared my uniform last night as we would be appearing in public, I appreciated the padding you put in in case it came to a fight. Not to mention that you look stunning in that

summer uniform.”

“...Please leave your opinion of me out of this. And it wasn’t difficult as I know your dimensions, Master Muneshige. But more importantly...”

“Judge. Nothing to report at the moment.”

For the time being, they had seen no one suspicious in the area. Musashi Ariadust Academy was a target of the remodeling just like everything else and materials and supplies were stacked up inside since it functioned as a post station. The areas between those were being patrolled by kobolds and...

“Sewers. Same as always.”

If experts like the black algae creatures had nothing to report, then it was unlikely there was a problem. Muneshige just had to continue his guard duties while leaving that to them. But...

“Master Muneshige, you can hear that, can’t you? The Ariake’s armor is shaking from the Vice Chancellor and Lady Kimi’s battle.”

“Judge. ...I wonder how that will turn out.”

“I do not know, but Musashi’s residents are too kind.”

Gin spoke quietly as she listened to the distant vibrations coming from that training.

“They all take people out to the battlefield like they’re inviting them out to play. What a troublesome nation.”

Asama did not understand what had just happened before her eyes.

Futayo had activated her Soaring Wings and then suddenly been “thrown” right and diagonally up from her direction of movement.

“...!”

She flew in a parabolic arc seven or eight meters tall and twenty meters long.

The way she flailed her limbs and the way Yoshiki smiled with her hands on her hips made it clear Futayo had not done this on purpose.

“Young children have so much energy.”

“Youth can send you flying through the air...?”

Asama could receive real time data from the Asama Shrine on people’s usage of Blessings and contracted spells. Her sign frame was currently showing the data on Futayo and Kimi, but...

“Um, Kimi and Futayo didn’t do anything, right? Futayo used Soaring Wings and Kimi just jumped backwards. Isn’t that right, Toori-kun and Kimi’s mother?”

“Could you just call me Yoshiki-chan?”

The woman made the request with a bitter smile, but Asama’s personality and habits would not allow it.

Gold Mar: “Did she fall? Should I have a friend pick her up?”

Asama looked up and saw Futayo spinning around at a height of about six meters.

If she could reorient herself like that, then she was conscious, so Asama sent a message to only Naito.

Asama: “I think she’s fine. But inform the surrounding transport personnel and the guard Technohexen unit just in case.”

Gold Mar: “Sure thing. Judge, judge. I’ll tell them there’s some exciting training going on.”

It certainly is exciting, thought Asama as she saw Futayo force a midair side flip and just barely get her feet on the edge of the scaffolding. But her angle and position were not quite enough to bring her body on top of the scaffolding. So as Asama watched, Futayo crouched down...

“————”

And she leaped backwards.

Futayo’s hair flowed out in front of her and she reached the scaffolding behind her. Asama heard a bitter laugh next to her.

It was Yoshiki.

“She’s hesitating. And the cause is pretty deeply rooted.”

“Um, what exactly happened earlier?”

“Judge. It’s simple. Kimi just shifted the timing of her jump a little.”

“Eh?”

Asama saw Kimi return to the previous scaffolding and calmly spin around. She extended one leg and both arms as she wiggled her spinning body back and forth.

“She kept the build-up for the leap inside her? Honestly, it’s a shame she’s such a capricious girl.”

“Yes, Kimi has always been pretty amazing... Or she would be if she wasn’t so capricious.”

“I know what you mean.”

After that, Asama tilted her head and asked Yoshiki a question.

“How did shifting the timing of her jump send Futayo flying?”

“Because Futayo-chan is a coward,” said Yoshiki. “Listen. When you pursue your opponent, they run away. Futayo-chan had caught onto that tempo and felt like she could close the gap between them. So just when she started moving in...Kimi stopped for a moment. Kimi perfectly predicted when Futayo-chan would use her acceleration spell and did it just before Futayo-chan moved forward. Far Eastern acceleration spells use purification, so it’s all over if it’s thrown out of order. That’s how Kimi ended it.”

Meaning...

“Judge. This battlefield is under Kimi’s control. And for a simple reason. This is the cause of Futayo-chan’s slump, it’s the source of her cowardice, and it’s incredibly simple. And Futayo-chan has of course realized what it is. It’s just that she refuses to accept it.”

Yoshiki smiled as she spoke.

“So,” she continued. “Kimi, go ahead and expose all of Futayo-chan’s weaknesses. If you don’t, that conservative girl won’t be able to trust herself even if she does think about changing.”

She really got me, thought Futayo as she made a back jump.

...I would expect no less of Kimi-dono!

This was not an issue of the Vice Chancellor against a non-officer. She had already lost once to this opponent.

Since Mikawa, Kimi had given her snacks, groomed her hair for her, and otherwise behaved like a friend during breaks between classes, but training was different.

Futayo was currently up against a formidable enemy.

...I need to stay focused.

She held a weapon in her hand, but she had her worries about the Tonbo Spare. She had her worries about herself as well. She needed to keep those worries from showing while training and, if possible, rid herself of them entirely.

She would continue training for that purpose.

“In that case...”

She activated Soaring Wings. Light appeared on her toes, knee, and leading shoulder.

“...”

She started forward, but...

“Too slow.”

After Kimi’s unexpected comment, the color white filled Futayo’s eyes.

Futayo had no clue what had happened.

White round masses suddenly appeared before her eyes.

“Look, look, look. Here are some awkward cushions.”

As Futayo tried to move forward, her face was buried. And when she thought about what this was...

...Kimi-dono's chest!?

Impossible, thought Futayo. *Not the size. Asama-dono and Mary-sama's are larger. The movement is the impossible part.* Kimi had been moving slowly, yet she had somehow arrived right in front of her. Which meant...

...She predicted my timing...

"Take this: Busty Press."

As Futayo had tried to move forward, her face had been buried in Kimi's chest and she had been robbed of her momentum. Then Kimi raised her hips as if to lift Futayo up.

...Kh...!

Futayo's forward momentum was lifted up by the resiliency of Kimi's breasts.

Soaring Wings made a valiant attempt to account for this unplanned change of direction. It changed the forward-directed acceleration purification in accordance with the user's wishes.

But those wishes did not successfully change the spell's direction even for an instant. Soaring Wings shattered and its power briefly fell out of equilibrium. This meant Soaring Wings tried to launch her upwards and she was also being pushed back, so there was only one direction she could go.

"...!"

Futayo was tossed into the air as if she had bounced off of Kimi.

"She flew pretty far this time."

"Tomo-chan, isn't that a little quick to get used to this? Are you okay?"

"Well, you know..." said Asama as she watched Futayo's parabolic arc.

She doubted the girl would fall, but...

"Kimi shows less restraint the more stubborn her opponent is, so I wonder if Futayo will be okay."

"Tomo-chan, you really know my kids well, don't you?"

“They have a long history of dragging me into their messes. Yes, and Horizon was a part of it in the beginning.”

Her sign frame showed that Kimi had yet to use a spell. The girl simply spun around while keeping her eyes on the sky. She made a gentle rotation to keep her gaze on Futayo’s airborne arc.

So as Futayo fell...

“Kimi is going to go after her without showing any restraint.”

Futayo thought to herself as she flew about forty meters through the air:
What is going on?

It was not just that her technique was not working; she could not even use it. She could not do anything.

She did not know if this was a different form of combat or a different level of combat.

But there was one thing she did know and one thing she could think while flying through the empty air.

...If I had even once run across an opponent like Kimi-dono in my past battles...

Her words of conviction sent her pulse racing as she spoke them aloud.

“I would have lost and the Far East would have met defeat.”

When she put it to words, she was astonished by her own weakness and fragility. But...

“What are you zoning out for? Get up.”

As she fell through the air, her body was spun around without warning.

After that half-rotation, she found her feet standing on the scaffolding. And she saw something in front of her weak gaze.

...Kimi-dono!?

She reflexively raised her head.

“Youuuuu weak-willed fool!!!”

A blow with a tornado windup struck Futayo on the cheek and she flew through the air again.

...Wow, it's been a while since I saw that...

Asama blankly watched Kimi's tornado slap and its result.

Saying this was "the first time since Naruze" would probably upset Naruze, but when Kimi did this...

"She must be pretty mad."

"That you didn't say 'as mad as she can be' shows just how well how you know my daughter, Tomo-chan."

"Well, you know..." said Asama as Futayo made four full rotations in midair, but Kimi used the rotation of her own body to grab Futayo's collar. Then her hair whipped behind her.

"...!"

With an intense sound, Kimi headbutted Futayo.

...Kh!

Futayo received an unavoidable hit.

Kimi had her by the collar and was swinging her around. However, Kimi only had her by the collar with one arm and Futayo's feet were not dangling in midair. But...

"...!?"

When she tried to plant her feet on the scaffolding, Kimi forced her off balance, but when she tried lifting them up, Kimi swung her around. This did not mean Kimi had incredible arm strength. She was simply using the shifts in body weight and unnecessary movements that Futayo used to move away.

Futayo knew what this meant.

...I am making needless movements and losing my calm!

She did not think Kimi was taking advantage of her. She was trying to do this properly, and yet...

“You really are a hopeless girl.”

Another headbutt hit her.

“Why do you always try to follow the other person’s lead?”

A reverberating blow hit her between the eyes. The stinging pain spread to her nose as well.

“Why are you only looking at yourself?”

You are contradicting yourself, thought Futayo. But as she hung her head, a blow hit the top of her head.

“You follow the other person’s lead and never decide anything for yourself. But even as you do that, you only evaluate your own performance. ...You have an egocentrism that relies on others. Could you be any worse?”

“But...!”

What other option is there? thought Futayo. She was inexperienced and her enemies were all powerful and skilled. There were times when she could only fight a defensive battle like with Shibata in Magdeburg. But...

“I don’t know who your enemies are. Heh heh. After all, I’m not you.”

Kimi swung her outwards as if to fling her away but then pulled her back in.

“But your enemies must have wanted a proper fight with you. And yet you wouldn’t fight in your own style. No, that isn’t quite right. I’m betting...”

I’m betting...

“You still don’t have a fighting style of your own.”

Futayo was utterly dumbfounded.

...I don’t have a fighting style of my own?

As soon as she thought that, an impact passed through her forehead and out the back of her head.

The blow was powerful enough to shake her vision and weaken her knees.

“Kwah...”

She moved her legs to somehow support herself, but her feet were trembling and dancing. She could not even call herself an acceleration spell user at this point.

But, she thought.

...If I don't have a fighting style of my own...then isn't it hopeless?

Musashi was sure to face powerful enemies in the future. What would happen if she fought those future opponents while inexperienced and with nothing to call her own?

But the sharp gaze of the dancer was still directed right at her.

Those eyes seemed to be looking through her eyes and into her brain and her deepest thoughts.

“A sheltered flower will wither on a shorter cycle, but it will bloom again before long.”

Kimi tilted Futayo's limp body upwards.

That placed something in Futayo's field of vision.

A sign frame floated in the sky and it displayed...

...Masazumi!

That was a scene of another confrontation. That old acquaintance of a Vice President was speaking at the special student general assembly to send Musashi back to the battlefield and return everything to normal.

“Do you understand?” asked Kimi. “Again and again, that flat-chested non-name inheritor has been defeated, felt resignation, made lame jokes, and desperately endured the fear as everyone relies on her. ...Of course, I'm not telling you to become her. You mustn't compare yourself to others.”

Kimi continued.

“Anyone, even my foolish brother, can do that much.”

Futayo's mind went blank at Kimi's line.

"Anyone...can do that much?"

"Judge. Silly girl. That's what makes you so ignorant of the world. You must have had a lovely upbringing. Think about it carefully. Heh heh... Just how frustrating does it have to be for Mr. Impossible to become a king? And if Mr. Impossible can become a king..."

Yes.

"Then anyone can become a king. That is known as usurpation or the rise of many warlords...in the world of samurai, at least."

"B-but I am not trying to be a king!"

"Then what do you want to be?"

She could not answer that.

Of course she could not. She simply wished to be stronger.

She was still searching for what came after that.

But a powerful gaze pressed her for an answer.

"So a foolish girl who doesn't even know what she wants to be is trying to fight those who are trying to become something? And you have the nerve to hesitate and self-obsess? Just how sorry for yourself do you feel? You have your head in the clouds and you had a sheltered upbringing, but I will end that for you here. After all..."

After all...

"You were flower raised to be let loose in the wild, but the final choice was left with you. So I will test you to see if you have blossomed yet. And then I will replant you here."

"Test me?"

"Judge," replied her opponent. "I know you are the type to follow your opponent's lead. So I will take away one of your options."

Are you listening?

“Honda Futayo. Samurai girl. Before my next dance comes to an end, I will decide whether or not you give up. And you can use that to think about whether you will continue to follow your opponent’s lead or not.”

A moment later, Futayo saw a certain color.

It was blue.

It was the color of the sky.

Kimi had sent her flying with a single blow from her toe tips.

But Futayo also saw a girl with the same surname as her speaking in the floating sign frame.

Masazumi was fighting.

Chapter 63: Right and Wrong Ones on the Scoreboard

第六十三章

『点数踏切の正否者達』



○か×かではない
○が×になり
×を○にするのだ
配点 (両立)

It isn't O or X

The Os can become Xs

And the Xs can be turned into Os

Point Allocation (Coexistence)

Masazumi felt the reverberation of a metallic sound as she and Tsukinowa viewed Ookubo's complaints.

●Vice President: Resistance Side

Objective: Take back the Far East's status and achieve peace by retrieving the Logismo Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse.

X: Wasn't our justification the retrieval of Vicereine Horizon?

X: This is too much for Musashi to accomplish.

1: Stop Hashiba.

X: We already lost to Hashiba.

X: Not allowing Hashiba's rule means opposing the Testament.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

X: War with the many powerful nations under Hashiba's control would be unavoidable.

X: Musashi is on its last chance, so how can we take such a large gamble?

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

X: Just as with 2, there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate.

X: There is no sign of the rule ending, so can we really do that?

She's taken this pretty far, thought Masazumi. When she saw it all together, she knew what she had to say.

“There is something I must say as a representative of the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers.”

That was...

“Currently, we are on the way to successfully reaching our objective.”

“Judge.” Without nodding, Ookubo spoke the word of judgment to ask for clarification. “Then please prove it.”

“Judge.” With a nod, Masazumi spoke the word of judgement to express her comprehension. “Then let’s start with **‘1: Stop Hashiba’**. ...You said **‘X: We already lost to Hashiba’**, but...”

Masazumi looked across the people gathered below the stairs.

“Musashi has not lost to Hashiba. We fought the Battle of Mikatagahara about three weeks ago. That was a history recreation, so *our loss was a foregone conclusion*. And our opponent there...was Qing-Takeda.”

“You are ignoring reality!!”

Ookubo suddenly spoke much more powerfully.

That was to be expected. Masazumi had gone first and foremost for that lost battle which was Ookubo’s greatest means of attack. Ookubo had likely predicted this, so of course she would work quickly to stop it.

Masazumi had no intention of looking back toward Ookubo. Ookubo’s shout was meant to gather the people’s attention on her rather than Masazumi. If Masazumi looked back too, the people who were unsure who to look at would follow suit and turn to Ookubo. Instead, Masazumi spread her arms toward the people.

“Of course, after passing through Mikawa and reaching the Edo region, we were attacked by Maeda Toshiie who was acting as a Qing-Takeda mercenary and by Hashiba who was working with him.”

She chose to continue speaking and to ignore Ookubo.

She could see out of the corner of her eye that Ookubo was not looking her way.

Ookubo was doing the same thing. If she had faced Masazumi while shouting, it would only have drawn attention to Masazumi ignoring her. That was why she had shouted her warning without looking Masazumi's way.

In front of an audience, every little action could be used to compete for support and attention. That was the situation here.

...Judge.

Masazumi spoke while focusing on herself, her opponent, and the people below.

"The Musashi was damaged by Maeda, Hashiba, and P.A. Oda who were temporarily under Qing-Takeda's command. But...Qing-Takeda originally planned to guide us to a peaceful defeat using interpretations."

"Please explain why that did not work out."

I had a feeling this was coming, thought Masazumi as she formed her words.

"In order to gain the cooperation of the Protestants and a friendly relationship with Hexagone Française and other factions, we took part in the Sack of Magdeburg as Protestants, evacuated the people of Magdeburg, and safely saw the Sack through to completion. To get back at us for that, P.A. Oda interfered with Musashi using the taboo method of conquering K.P.A. Italia and securing the Pope-Chancellor for themselves."

"I see what you are saying." Ookubo explained what that was while looking to the people. "Vice President, you were unable to predict that participating in the Sack of Magdeburg would lead to the current situation. ...Isn't that right?"

"She's being pretty ridiculous."

Six black wings spoke on Musashi Ariadust Academy's roof.

It was Naruze. She was already equipped with Weiss Fräulein and she walked along the roof to check for readings from the intruder detection charms setup here and there.

“Do you really think anyone could have predicted it would turn out like that?”

Gold Mar: “Well, I think that’s her point.”

“Judge,” agreed Naruze. Displayed in her crop mark frame Magie Figur, Margot was equipped with Schwarz Fräulein on top of Musashino’s bridge-shaped command bridge. The broom was supported by a bipod, she was kneeling, and a telescope spell was opened above the broom’s handle. She was searching for any suspicious movements.

Her usual smile was narrowed as if she were taking aim.

Gold Mar: “Ga-chan, did you put some makeup on before heading up there?”

Mal-Ga: “Sign frame images are more vivid than seeing it in person.”

“That’s nice,” said Margot.

Naruze hoped the other girl could not see the heat in her cheeks through the makeup, so...

“Keep your eye on what you can see, Margot. Masazumi is...”

Gold Mar: “Yes, it looks like she can answer this. That means she has an explanation for why she couldn’t predict the current situation.”

Mal-Ga: “What do you think she’ll say? I just hope whatever it is makes good doujinshi material....”

Gold Mar: “Well, I’m guessing it comes down to the fact that no one could have predicted it.”

Mal-Ga: “But that’s the same as overlooking her own incompetence by saying everyone else is just as incompetent.”

“Oh, I get it,” said Margot.

Gold Mar: “Maybe the best option is to accept her failure and then recover from that by explaining how she’ll prevent it from happening again... And we did respond to what happened appropriately.”

Once Margot said that, Naruze heard Masazumi’s voice from the bridge below.

“I was unable to predict that participating in the Sack of Magdeburg would

lead to the current situation?”

Naruze stopped walking to the next detection spell. She suppressed the swaying of her wings and looked to Masazumi’s back.

...What is she going to do?

Would she apologize for being unable to predict it? A prostration would be a rare sight, so she wanted to make a quick sketch. And then she wanted to tell Masazumi something: “Your prostration really saved the day! For my doujinshi!”

As she watched with wings raised, Masazumi moved.

The girl’s shoulders lowered as she exhaled and she spoke.

“Listen. I easily predicted that participating in the Sack of Magdeburg could lead to the current situation. It is because I can make that kind of prediction that I am Musashi’s Vice President.”

She stated it quite clearly.

“I predicted everything that is happening now.”

Horizon placed her hand on the shoulder of the crossdresser sitting next to her.

“Toori-sama, I will choose my words carefully as this is a horrible thing to say, but when Masazumi-sama is under extreme pressure, she becomes just as crazy as you.”

“Hold on. Just to be clear, Masazumi isn’t a real crossdresser or a nudist, so my crazy is better.”

“Umm...” said Mitotsudaira while hanging her head.

“Lady Masazumi never disappoints.” Mary spoke to Tenzou with a smile. “She always makes sure to say the things we want to believe.”

Laughter echoed through a stone hall.

The laughter came from Elizabeth as she crossed her legs in her chair.

“Well said. You know to turn the politician’s podium into your own stage, Far Eastern representative!! Trumps! Do you think Musashi Vice President Masazumi is lying about this!?”

They all eventually held up “O” sign frames to show they did. The Fairy Queen smiled when she saw them.

“Every last one of you is wrong.”

A hole opened below Jonson’s feet and he fell into it.

“Ahhhhhh...”

While Walsingham counted on her fingers, Elizabeth sighed.

“I couldn’t continue the quiz if I sent all of you down. You should thank Jonson.”

Jonson ran in through the side entrance while soaking wet.

“I’m very sorry! I ran back as quick as I could, mates!”

“That was too quick.”

A hole opened below Jonson’s feet and the poet fell again.

“Ohhhhh...”

Hawkins raised a hand in his swim trunks, goggle cap, and scarf.

“Fairy Queen, I am more accustomed to water than Jonson, so wouldn’t I be the best choice at times like this?”

A hole opened below Hawkins’s feet. Hawkins fell with an audible “eh?” and the Fairy Queen tilted her head.

“The swim team must be strange indeed to actually *want* to fall down there. Any other volunteers?”

They all quickly shook their head. Walsingham counted on her fingers and stopped just before the splash down below. Voices echoed up from far belowground.

“Oh, mate! Why did you fall down too!?”

“I’m not sure! Really, I’m not sure!”

“Now, then.”

The Fairy Queen ignored them and turned toward Dudley who stood next to her.

“Why can we say that the Musashi Vice President is not lying? Can anyone tell me that?”

“Testament. Th-th-th-th-that is obvious. A-a-after all, the V-V-V-Vice President is the c-c-c-cornerstone of politics. She must a-a-a-always be th-th-th-thinking about the worst case s-s-s-scenario! ...C-C-C-Cecil!”

“Exactlyyy.”

On the opposite side from Dudley, Cecil tossed several chips into her mouth.

“Thinking about the worst case everyday makes you worryyy.”

“Could I have some of those chips?”

“Are you worried too, Queeeeen?”

“There is a lot that concerns me. But I can get over most of that by having all of you deal with it.”

With that, Elizabeth grabbed a chip from the paper bag and stuck it in her mouth.

“Are these from the stand on the road down below? You have excellent taste, Cecil.”

“They blow away your worriiies.”

“Here.” The Fairy Queen passed some to Dudley and then ate another one. “This is making me thirsty. ...Water.”

“Ha ha ha! I’m back and I feel like I’ve just had a nice bath, mates!”

“Testament! The swim team loves the water!”

“And yet neither of you brought any back for me?”

The two fell once more and Elizabeth twisted in her chair.

“Every politician considers the worst case scenario. And politicians work to

preserve their nation even if that scenario were to occur. You are exactly right, Masazumi.”

So...

“Tell her, Masazumi. Tell her you had considered all of this.”

“Yes, this was all part of the worst case scenario I considered.”

“You’re saying you predicted the current situation?”

Masazumi did not turn toward Ookubo, but she did respond.

“As one of the situations leading to the worst case, yes. This is of course within the possibilities I considered.”

“Then why didn’t you try to avoid it? If you had tried to avoid the worst case scenario, the current situation would have to be better than it is now.”

“You think this is the worst case? I can’t agree with you there.”

Masazumi looked to the people below.

“Let me make something very clear. The worst case in my mind is...”

Is...

“The sinking of the Musashi.”

“We avoided having the Musashi sunk at Mikatagahara.”

Masazumi looked across the people while expressing her thoughts.

They had been duty-bound to lose that battle and the Testament Union had been under the enemy’s control.

“We did well to survive from Magdeburg to here, and now we are in position to take the next step. Back then, we were in no position to secure equipment for the Musashi and fleeing was our only option. But now that we have escaped that situation, we are no longer bound by a predetermined loss. Soon we will be free to make our own attack. We are nearly there.”

Masazumi said “so” again.

“We did an excellent job of ‘losing’ the history recreation of the Battle of Mikatagahara, but that was not true ‘defeat’. It was only a ‘loss’ as part of the history recreation. The enemy squandered their first and last chance. The enemy had history, the Testament Union, and an immense military force on their side, but they still failed to capture the Musashi. ...You did well to survive that, everyone. Musashi’s remodeling is nearly done and we must rush to leave port, but it was you that allowed us to recover to this point.”

Masazumi clenched her right fist, held it to her chest, and lowered her head.

“Everyone aboard the Musashi has my thanks as Vice President for preventing that loss from becoming a defeat and for carrying us to next step.”

“This girl is one wrong step away from being a truly wicked woman,” commented Segundo.

Juana raised her eyebrows and Fusae smiled a little in response.

Juana spun her chair around to face Segundo.

“What do you mean? I believe the Musashi Vice President has only described the current situation from her point of view.”

It was not Segundo that answered her question; it was Fusae. The Valdés sister tilted her head as Fusae waved a hand and spoke.

“This is a lesson you could stand to learn too, Ju. ...Um? I think everyone in Musashi must have been anxious after their loss. They probably trained their bodies or worked on the remodeling to rid themselves of that anxiety. But...do you know why they chose to do it in a way that left something tangible behind?”

“Well...” Juana lowered her head and placed a finger on her lips as she thought for a few seconds. “They’re a lot like Tres España before the Armada battle. We were all working to prepare all sorts of things, but now I can tell we were all looking to our future of defeat and decline. So... Testament, we wanted to believe our efforts would be useful.”

“That’s right. You understand the rest then, don’t you? What did Musashi’s

Vice President tell the people who were worried everything they're doing would be for nothing?"

"She thanked them..."

Once she said that, Juana looked up and faced Segundo.

"Thanking and praising people makes you a wicked woman!? Then does being strict with them make you a saint of a woman!?"

"No, Juana, that isn't what I meant. It's surprisingly close to my point, though."

Segundo picked up a newspaper and looked up to the ceiling.

"From Magdeburg to now, they desperately fled, worked hard despite being worn down and damaged, lost a major battle, and remodeled the Musashi with worry in their hearts... Musashi's Vice President just praised everything they did. All this time, they had been worried and concerned that their efforts had been for nothing, but their nation's representative said that isn't true, that their actions brought the Musashi this far, and that they gave it a future. She even thanked them for it," he said. "What's going to happen now? She just overturned all of their worries and doubts with this one exchange."

Takakane had been reading a baseball information magazine at his desk, but he suddenly spoke up.

"If it was me, I wouldn't stick with their Representative Council Head. After all, she's basically saying that everything Musashi's done was for nothing. That's like telling all those worried people to give up."

But...

"She's saying their efforts were worthless so they should give up, but everyone prefers hearing those efforts were meaningful, that they helped, and that someone wants them to keep it up. Of course...that might send Musashi through hell in the future."

"———"

Juana was at a loss for words and Segundo spoke to her.

"All Musashi's Vice President did was thank them while expressing things in a

way that benefits her. ...But that's what the people wanted. If she was doing that on purpose, then she is either a wicked woman, or..."

How should I put it?

"A politician who can align people's hearts with what she wants to do."

Masazumi listened to the silence as she bowed.

All of the people had stopped moving and none of them tried to speak.

It took a few moments of stillness before she understood they were waiting for her words.

...Did that help?

She wanted to think it had helped to support and express her approval of what the others had done. After all...

...I think this too is part of my own growth.

Until Mikawa, she had thought a politician was someone who implemented the optimal politics and made the optimal decisions, but she had realized that was not the case at Mikawa when Horizon's death had been approaching.

She had experienced first-hand that a politician was someone who implemented the politics needed to survive and made some suboptimal decisions. When searching out a suboptimal path to ensure Horizon's survival, she had been worried whether or not that was the right thing to do. She had also worried whether or not she was the right person to do it.

But an idiot had given her unconditional support. So...

...I can be an idiot too.

My decisions might send Musashi through hell, but I will do whatever it takes to ensure our survival. And if everyone is worried as they work toward that end, I will support them.

Because, unfortunately enough, I'm being supported by Musashi's most powerful individual. So...

"Let me say this."

I will put in the work needed to live up to what that supportive idiot wants.

Even if I question whether or not what I'm doing is best, I won't worry. Instead, I'll help out by supporting anyone else who's worried. That is how much I've grown for the time being. So...

"I have one thing to say about your first complaint. ...Accepting Hashiba's rule does not conflict with stopping Hashiba."

As for why...

"We will be stopping Hashiba's forces from interfering with the other nations' history, taking the history recreation too far, or forcing death on anyone. Hashiba's rule is a forgone conclusion in Far Eastern history, so rejecting that would also mean rejecting Matsudaira's rule. We would be establishing a double standard otherwise. But taking the history recreation too far or forcing death on people with the Testament descriptions is murder. Every nation must follow the rules of the history recreation and work together. From that perspective, Musashi is not alone. If Hashiba violates the history recreation, the other nations will work with us to stop them and resist them. That is their duty as a part of this world."

Masazumi had Tsukinowa open a sign frame.

"Thus, here are my corrections to your complaints under #1."

1: Stop Hashiba.

O: We lost to Hashiba as part of the history recreation. There are no further similar opportunities.

O: To stop Hashiba is to preserve the history recreation, so the other nations are obligated to help.

"Now, then."

Masazumi and Tsukinowa waved a hand in unison to smash the sign frame.

"I think I'll get started on smashing #2 and #3 now."

"Please wait."

Ookubo cut in from the side.

“You say you predicted this and that everyone did well, but aren’t you ignoring the inconvenient parts? During and leading up to the Battle of Mikatagahara, we lost Former Hexagone Française Chancellor Anne, Lord Matsunaga, Lady Yoshitsune, and Satomi’s Chancellor. ...You really expect me to believe you ‘predicted’ all that?”

Yoshiyasu stopped walking through the multilayered city and a word escaped her mouth.

“Wait...”

Not even she knew what that was telling to wait, but...

...Stop that.

Don’t you praise him or judge him.

Don’t define this for yourself by either idolizing his death or stripping it of all meaning. So...

“———”

The vassal walked a few steps ahead of her before looking back. And...

“Um, Yoshiyasu-san? You look pale. ...Are you afraid of heights?”

“My god of war flies, you know? ...Although I guess it’s not really the same.”

Someone else turned back with a smile. It was Yoshiaki. She hid her crescent moon mouth behind her fan.

“A public figure’s private matters are private, but their public matters belong to everyone.”

Some tension seemed to leave Yoshiaki’s face and Yoshiyasu realized something.

“Sorry.”

Yoshiaki laughed quietly at that word.

“I don’t mind. And I have no intention of being indebted to Satomi over that.

Over Komahime, that is.”

But as Yoshiyasu lowered her head, she heard a voice. It was the Musashi Vice President’s.

“My predictions were of the worst case scenario for Musashi. It is true that representatives of other nations did everything they could to avoid that scenario, but that was part of their predictions, not mine. ...They did what they felt would avoid their own worst case scenario and that happened to save us.”

And...

“We can guess at what they were hoping for, but with Hexagone Française and Satomi, there are those who have inherited their wills. They do not belong to us and we cannot speak of them using our own predictions.”

Yoshiyasu breathed a heavy mental sigh at the Musashi Vice President’s words and Yoshiaki gave a shallow nod.

“Musashi’s Vice President is strict. ...She is already telling you to take over for the previous generation.”

“Now, then,” said Masazumi as she raised two fingers toward the people. Tsukinowa copied the action to open a sign frame with the #2 opinion listed on it.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

X: War with the many powerful nations under Hashiba’s control would be unavoidable.

X: Musashi is on its last chance, so how can we take such a large gamble?

“Let’s continue with these two complaints. First, about the possibility of war with powerful nations...”

The crowd below tensed up a little. Or she thought it did.

The people on the Ariake had experienced a battle the day before and they

knew of Hashiba's attack on Satomi and Edo. They all knew what it meant to take on a powerful nation. But...

"Let's continue on without fear. Cowardice is curable."

So Masazumi stood proudly tall and spread her arms a little.

"It is possible Musashi will wage war with a powerful nation in the future. But if we limit Musashi to Matsudaira's history recreation, we have no more major losses. And if we act as a mercenary for another nation, we can check over the contents of the battle in advance. I think the possibility of major damage is remarkably low."

She swept her hand from west to north in order to indicate all of the Ariake and the Musashi.

"We have sent ambassadors to the three nations and we have reached this point thanks to the cooperation of England, Hexagone Française, the Protestants, Qing-Takeda, and Satomi which we earned through diplomacy. As I already said, if we accurately follow the history recreation and keep up the diplomacy, the other nations will work with us and respond to our results. ...In other words, we can make adjustments to any battles with powerful nations."

And while I'm at it, added Masazumi in her heart. I can get rid of this other X too.

"Looking at it that way, you can see that this is not Musashi's last chance. If we cooperate with the other nations, we can earn their trust as we did with England and then we can gain the advantages of trading there from then on. Through intermediate trade, we could also contact the nations with a connection to the cooperative nations."

She placed a hand on her chest and closed her eyes.

"So as long as I predict the worst case scenario and consider ways to avoid that, the Musashi will not sink. If we then continue cooperating with other nations, we could gain many locations like the Ariake as well as the funds and right to repair or remodel. And as long as Musashi remains on the move, it will remain a constant deterrent. But..."

She took a breath, raised her right hand, and shook it left and right as a sign of

rejection.

“If we stop moving, Musashi’s effectiveness as a deterrent will fade and eventually vanish. Then no one will pay us any heed.”

A crossdresser tilted his head in a waiting room at Sviet Rus’s Kasuga Gora Kremlin.

“What’s this deterrent stuff Seijun’s talking about?”

“She is talking about the intimidation that Musashi causes without actually doing anything,” quickly answered Mitotsudaira. “For example, when I am near you, someone who wants to attack you might give up just because I am there. Neither of us did anything, but my actual power prevented them from acting. That is called a deterrent.”

“Wow, I’m useless... But isn’t that dangerous?”

“It is.” Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly. “When a powerful nation tries to force a weaker nation to obey, they will sometimes show off their military might so the weaker nation won’t think of opposing them. A deterrent can also be called a show of force. So...”

So...

“For your power to be a deterrent rather than a show of force, there must be trust between you and the other nations. They have to trust that you won’t show off your power to threaten other nations and that you’ll use that power to protect them from invasion. Otherwise, it doesn’t matter how much you claim your power is only a deterrent; they won’t believe you and will think you’re being shameless.”

“In that case,” continued Mary. “For Musashi to do that, we need to establish relationships with the other nations and earn their trust. And we must also reform our own power.”

“That’s right. ...It isn’t a large amount of power that’s needed. We need to show we’re updating our power for the current age and that we intend to use it properly. If we don’t do that, our old-fashioned power will be easily invaded

and cannot be used as a deterrent. ...To do that, we need funds, a location, and technology. It isn't something we can do while standing still. That is why Masazumi said we must remain a 'constant deterrent'."

Just as the bitterness left Mitotsudaira's smile, Masazumi made her corrections to the complaints.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

O: Most battles in the history recreation are with powerful nations and we can gain the cooperation of those powerful nations.

O: As long as Musashi forms relationships with the other nations, it can continue to exist.

"That completes #1 and #2. That just leaves the two Xs for #3 and for the overall objective."

Just as Horizon nodded expressionlessly, Ookubo's words appeared on the sign frame.

Ookubo: "I have a question."

That is...

Ookubo: "If Musashi is to act as a constant deterrent, it will require a massive amount of funds, so wouldn't it be best to act as a trading ship as before? That precludes the damage brought by battle and it will increase Musashi's assets. And if we expand their trade power, the other nations will protect us. Wouldn't that be safer?"

I see, thought Masazumi.

Ookubo was saying they should develop themselves as a trade city even more actively than before Mikawa.

...That's a lot like one of the suggestions I made at England.

Instead of making a single circuit of the Far East each year, they would

establish bases and more efficiently trade with them. Unless technology was developed that surpassed the Musashi's transportation abilities, Musashi would be protected as and receive the benefits of being a trade nation.

But, added Masazumi.

"What Musashi needs now is to protect, not to be protected."

"What do you mean by that?"

Ookubo had stopped using her fake-sounding dialect, but Masazumi did not know if that meant she was getting worked up or not. *Either way, I need to be careful*, she decided before speaking.

"First, *being protected for our trade* requires a close relationship with that nation. That will take time, a great amount of trading, and a great number of trades. If we are looking to the short-term goal of Westphalia, that would be difficult to accomplish.

"And second, the Musashi can transport a massive amount of materials. Even if we do not use that transportation space exclusively for trade, we can still carry more than enough to trade with multiple nations and we are remodeling it to carry even more."

Masazumi raised a third finger.

"Also, when protecting the other nations through deterrence, the Musashi just has to be there, trade goods or not. Our protection will reach the other nations when we are simply nearby and that will build trust. But if our diplomacy requires trade goods, time and effort are needed to secure the goods and to unload and load them. That is incredibly dangerous at a time of war. I wish to use the Musashi as a transport ship while also practicing deterrence diplomacy. That way, the Musashi can perform mid-level trade while on standby."

"I see. You seem to have put together this plan in conjunction with the remodeling of the Musashi. Then I have a question."

"What is it?"

"Judge."

Masazumi sensed Ookubo nodding next to her.

“First, I received a suggestion from someone else, so I would like to place it under consideration here. ...This suggestion says Musashi could act as a deterrent even while acting primarily as a trade ship.”

“What?”

For a moment, Masazumi had no idea what Ookubo meant.

...Deterrence through trade?

It was true the money earned through trade could be used to strengthen themselves militarily or spent on diplomacy. If they used the money effectively, it was true they could increase their effectiveness as a deterrent. But...

...Wait.

Something seemed off about this. But why? No, she knew why. She just refused to accept it. Because accepting it was not going to help. So...

“Not you two again!!”

As soon as Masazumi raised her voice and looked back, the school’s front entrance burst open.

“Thank you as always!”

A prostration slid swiftly across the bridge.

Chapter 64: Apologizer in a Rushed Place

第六十四章

『急ぎ場の謝罪者』



何故そこまで
捨てられるのか
配点（運命ゆえ）

How can you let

So much be thrown out?

Point Allocation (Because of Destiny)

Masazumi saw a prostration run out.

She made a small sidestep to avoid it and saw the rushing prostration use a spell to accelerate.

The prostration was briefly surrounded by a white fox aura before hopping up a bit from the bridge and performing a screeching drift. It then rotated around in an accelerated turn that brought it behind Ookubo.

It stopped.

Then the prostration transformed into a human.

Each of the joints extended from prostration-form to human-form and it stood behind Ookubo.

“Hey, Bertoni.”

“Ah! What is it, Masazumi!?”

Another nuisance ran from the school entrance to behind Ookubo. The nuisance of a girl stood next to the former prostration and Ookubo before pointing at Masazumi with both hands.

“Don’t think a loser has the same human monetary value as Shiro-kun and the rest of us! You can probably tell, but this is something of a...um, coup d’etat? Anyway, we’re planning to change the Musashi into aerial money for trading purposes and trading purposes only!!”

“Don’t gloss over your revolution with ‘anyway’!!!”

“Wait, Masazumi. Just to be clear, this isn’t a revolution. ...I’ll tell you why if you pay us.”

“...No, thanks then.”

“There’s nothing to worry about. How much can you pay? 980 yen?”

“Don’t ask the impossible.”

“Then how about 300 yen?”

“Maybe if this was yesterday.”

“What about 86 yen?”

“What? You expect me to go without dinner? Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Um, Vice President,” interjected Ookubo. “I’m hearing a lot of very troublesome statements that have nothing to do with the topic at hand...”

...Oh, I’m turning into the kind of upperclassman that worries her underclassmen.

But the merchants were apparently rethinking their tactics. They crouched down to discuss something and then the girl faced Masazumi with a giant smile on her face and while rubbing her hands together.

“You should really hear us out, Masazumi! You might learn how to defeat us here! You might learn how to overcome our harassment!”

“You just admitted it was harassment, didn’t you!? Didn’t you!? I’m calling the guard station, okay!?”

“Huh!? Huhhh!? Masazumi, why do you always rely on the law when you can just solve all your problems with money!? That makes no sense! You stupid, stupid poor person!”

“It’s the normal thing to do!!!”

“Um...” spoke up Oriotorai who was acting as judge behind them. She waved over at Masazumi. “Hey, Masazumi? I got a little carried away with the music I was listening to a few nights back and...long story short, I was eating breakfast in the guard station, so I’d really rather not have the guards called here.”

“See? Did hear that, Masazumi!? She won’t let you call the guards! That means sensei is on our side! Got anything to say to that!?”

“Sorry, sensei, but they’ve added a few people to their side. To even it out, can I call Naruze and Naomasa here?”

“Wh-why would you call people who don’t know how to take a joke,

Masazumi!? Are you trying to kill us!? Oh, I get it! I get it! Musashi's political elites are finally after our lives, Shiro-kun! You never know what a broke politician is going to do when she's in a bind!"

"Um." Ookubo raised her right hand. "I did pay you two to fulfill my side of the contract, so can you take this a little more seriously?"

"The contract?" asked Masazumi.

"Judge." Ookubo nodded and glanced over at the Treasurer pair. "I asked them if they could side with me instead of the current Student Council."

"I can't believe you two!"

"What?" The merchant girl frowned. "Oh, c'mon. Don't look at us like we're traitors, Masazumi! We're just siding with the people who treat us right!"

"Um, so I just have to pay you too?"

"Incorrect. Listen, Masazumi. It would be most accurate to say Heidi and I have been blinded by the money before our eyes. Money is dazzling after all."

"What am I supposed to do when I don't even understand your premise?"

"Hear me out before making up your mind. Okay?"

"Hmm..."

Masazumi could not bear to look right at them, but she decided to at least listen.

Bertoni placed a hand on his chin.

"To put it simply, we have switched sides on the condition that we are given control of Musashi's economy. In other words, we can do whatever we want with Musashi's commerce once it becomes a trade ship. Placing your dinner money in front of me simply cannot compare. Of course, no money is worthless, so if you will give me your dinner money, I will gladly accept it. But if you are not doing that, then think carefully about how you use it. You must not waste it. You must plan out how your money is spent. If you hoard it, it is nothing more than metal or ink on paper. If you head out into town every weekend and spend as much money as you can, it should be an enlightening experience in a number of ways. I recommend the Marube-ya. But that is enough for now on how to

spend money. Tomorrow, I can teach you how to actually make payments. A single snap of the wrist can speed up the process at the register.”

“You said to hear you out before making up my mind, but you two have given me nothing but crazy from the very beginning. But anyway...”

Masazumi took a breath, placed her right hand on her hips, and relaxed her body.

“What do you intend to do after converting us into a trade ship? Give me your plan for defense and everything else.”

“That is simple. We will rework Musashi’s Shinto under the commerce god of Inari. That will allow us to make all forms of spell substitutions via monetary payments. ...Do you know what that means?”

“That would allow us to make each ship, city, and block independent!”

Mitotsudaira unintentionally voiced her thought aloud and tensed her shoulders when she noticed everyone focusing on her.

“No, um.” She waved her hands back and forth. “What I mean is, uh... Currently, things like Musashi’s defense spells use the Musashi’s internal ether fuel and are managed by ‘Musashi’ and the other automatons. If that could be handled with substitutions for ether fuel at the shrine or even a sign frame or handheld shrine...”

“Each municipality could manage itself without ‘Musashi’ and the others and they could use money to defend themselves without using the Musashi’s ether fuel, correct?”

Mitotsudaira nodded at Horizon’s explanation. She displayed a map of the Musashi’s ships and a breakdown of their revenue on a sign frame.

“Depending on the amount of investment fees and affiliated shrines, I think it would be possible to deploy all sorts of Shinto spells on the Musashi. But...”

What am I supposed to say about this? thought Mitotsudaira.

“That will mean the Musashi consumes massive amounts of money. That money has to come from somewhere, and that will ultimately mean the

residents.”

“Eh? But I’m broke. Cause I buy so many porn games.”

“Not to worry, Toori-sama. Mitotsudaira-sama will establish a porn game tax for you. It will increase the price of every porn game by 500%, but you will be able to buy as many of them as you want.”

“That’ll just end up developing my discerning eye even further.”

“Well, setting that aside...” Mitotsudaira cleared her throat. “Judge. It would work out for those like me who own territory, but it would not work out so well on Takao or Oume which are full of normal citizens. Most likely, they will form an autonomous alliance between the ships to manage the defense costs that would be paid with taxes and then perform the defenses on a ship-by-ship basis. But...”

But...

“Since a ship could run short of funds or unexpected defense costs could crop up, a higher autonomous alliance that covers Musashi as a whole would be needed. A fund would be set up from a portion of each ship’s defense costs and Musashi’s overall income and that would be used to pay for any deficiencies or unexpected costs or to take on the debt incurred.”

“Then wouldn’t all the money and influence gather in that overall autonomous alliance?” asked Tenzou.

“...Heidi and Shirojiro have made quite a ridiculous suggestion here.”

“Have they?”

“Judge. There’s no way each of the ships can defend their structures with money and personnel. Preparing a single armor panel is a far more efficient form of defense than spending money on a spell each and every time. That’s what it comes down to. And if they use the monetary defenses alongside the armor, the costs will end up being the same as they are now... No, if the people are managing it instead of the automatons, it will actually cost more than now.”

“Judge.” Mary nodded with a troubled smile. “That would wear down on the owners of the different territories. ...In England, the throne buys up the

autonomy of areas that have been worn down too much and then loans it out to secure land that is under the throne's direct control. Are Lord Shirojiro and Lady Heidi thinking of placing all of Musashi under the Treasurer's direct control?"

"Mary-dono, you must remember that Shirojiro-dono and Heidi-dono are wild moneygrubbers, so I doubt they are thinking it through that far. They are seeking money on a more instinctual level."

"Oh, that's a relief."

Is that really what this is? wondered Mitotsudaira. But...

"Monetary defenses are an interesting idea. It would be possible to achieve short-term independence like that, but...it would be difficult to make it last."

After all...

"If you wished to destroy Musashi, you would only need to refuse trade. If two or three nations did so and then attacked, I doubt the Musashi would survive it."

"Okay, we've heard from an actual territorial lord and a royal. Running Musashi on a purely monetary system wouldn't work."

"Judge."

Masazumi saw Bertoni nod. He then faced her and powerfully rubbed his hands together.

"Even if it clearly wouldn't work, there are some things people simply must do in the pursuit of money!"

"No, there aren't! You two really didn't give this any thought, did you!?"

Masazumi ignored the other crazy person who was shouting "You're so lovely, Shiro-kun!", but she did have a thought of her own.

...Researching different forms of defense and offense might not be a bad idea...

If Neshinbara were here, would he have some suggestions? But...

“Y’know, you’re talking about managing everything under a single commerce god, but the Asama Shrine is Musashi’s main shrine. What would you do about that?”

“Oh, c’mon, Masazumi. Wouldn’t a commerce shrine be better than a boobs shrine? The Inari stuff is really cute and wouldn’t it be cool to have them make a shrine for Musashi that Shiro-kun ran for them? Just picture it: Shiro-kun standing there behind the offering box and catching all the coins people try to throw in it.”

Masazumi refused to picture it and instead looked up while wondering what Asama was doing at the moment.

That was precisely when an arrow forcefully stabbed into the bridge between her and the merchants.

The high-speed shot was wrapped in light and it produced a solid sound while leaving a vibration in its wake. The shot brought the wind with it and a sign frame appeared above it.

Asama: “Oh, sorry, Masazumi. I missed. Guiding it from a duct is pretty hard. I’ll hit next time, so please have Tsukinowa face Heidi and Shirojiro.”

“Judge, judge,” replied Masazumi as she looked to Augesvarer for confirmation. Tsukinowa followed suit, so the merchants stepped back in fear.

“A-are you allowed to shoot us because even the gods fought wars over divine matters? Is that it, Asama-chi!?”

“Yes. It’s A-OK as long as it’s a conflict between Shinto forces. In fact, blasting them into smithereens can create another god, so our policy is to go all out.”

“I-I can’t believe this pair of boobs! Is that how you spread your boobs cult!?”

“Well, after what we discussed last night, I can’t really deny that one. Ah ha ha.”

Mal-Ga: “That pair of boobs is getting stubborn.”

Marube-ya: “Um, I’d like to use this behind-the-scenes venue to make a compromise...”

Asama: “Yes, we’re all very busy right now, so it would be nice if we could take a break and eat some snacks together. They put out a brandy version of those snacks I ordered back in England, didn’t they?”

Marube-ya: “Kh...! This pair of boobs just has to choose the really expensive ones, doesn’t she!?”

An arrow hit Augesvarer’s right shoe. It stabbed into the space between her first and second toe. It pierced the floor as well, so she quickly removed the shoe.

“Hm.” Masazumi placed a hand on her chin and faced Augesvarer and Bertoni once more. “What will you do?”

Without speaking a word, Bertoni and Augesvarer slowly walked over behind her and then faced Ookubo.

“I can’t believe the Representative Council Head would rebel against the Student Council! Truly unforgivable!”

“That’s right, Shiro-kun! She even tried to buy us off! Like that would work!”

“Excuse me,” said Ookubo. “But I have the receipt you gave me last night.”

Hearing that, Masazumi looked to the Treasurer pair. They exchanged a glance and the boy looked to her.

“Masazumi, she tricked us. She blinded us with promises of money.”

“How was that a trick!?”

Anyway, thought Masazumi

...At least this ended up showing that trade wouldn’t give us the deterrence and defenses we need.

So, she thought while gesturing for the Treasurer pair to stand back and facing the people below.

“Now, let us discuss the complaints for #3.”

Suzu listened to the debate on Musashi as sound.

Her special sensor known as Noise Neighbor allowed her to convert text data into voices. Asama had arranged to have the spell reproduce the speaker's tone based on the collected tone data.

...So it feels like...they're speaking for me...even from a distance...?

It may have been like it was echoing down a tube. But she appreciated how well it reproduced Masazumi's decisive tone. It had to read out the speaker's name at the start, but that was unavoidable.

Vice President: "You said '**there is no guarantee the other nations will cooperate**', but whether or not we gain the cooperation of the other nations at Westphalia depends on what we accomplish until then. At Magdeburg, the Protestants, Hexagone Française, and the Mlasi factions already agreed to help us stop Hashiba. ...Listen. The Protestants and Hexagone Française are victors at Westphalia. We also received a request to meet with a representative of Holland, another of those victors. There is something we must do to obtain their cooperation, but they will help us when it comes to stopping Hashiba, which is the very thing we must do. In other words, we will be victorious at Westphalia if we continue doing what we are doing."

She went on to address the next point: **There is no sign of the rule ending, so can we really do that?**

Vice President: "I have already advocated that the other nations move out to the external world alongside the end of the provisional rule. If that is to happen, the Far East must have peace as a home base for that external movement. The materials needed to support those nations must be produced, secured, and transported. That requires peace in the Far East and the establishment of largescale production and transportation methods. That would be impossible with the current double structure of the Far East, but another option might come into view once Matsudaira's rule begins."

Ookubo: "I have an objection."

That's her opponent, thought Suzu while tensing up.

Ookubo: "Do you have any guarantee the other nations will leave for the external world to end the provisional rule? ...If Musashi destroys Hashiba, they will have no enemies left and the Musashi will have been worn down, so won't

they aim for another provisional rule?”

Vice President: “Population growth will become a barrier to the provisional rule. ...That is what I am basing this on.”

...Population growth will get rid of...the provisional rule?

Just as Suzu asked that, another “voice” entered the divine transmission. It was Ohiroshiki’s.

Worshiper: “You mean the data I gave you last night, don’t you!?”

Flat Vassal: “Don’t tell me this means there are going to be more little girls!”

Worshiper: “That would be amazing, wouldn’t it!? Wouldn’t it!? Hooray! ... Sorry for getting carried away. Um, the relationship between food and population will become a future problem for both the cooking club and the farming club. According to the Testament descriptions, the Far Eastern population was about twelve million at the end of the Warring States period, but it rose above twenty million by the middle of the 1600s.”

Laborer: “That’s quite the jump.”

Worshiper: “During the Warring States period, the manorial system was destroyed and cultivated land and paddy fields spread in its place. And after the fighting stopped, food was plentiful and the population grew...which would increase the number of little girls too. That should happen in our world of the history recreation as well.”

Scarred: “Judge. Similar population increases occur around the world and not just in the Far East. England and the other powerful European nations established a largescale transportation system after the Age of Exploration, so the population continued to rise even during the Thirty Years’ War.”

Adele cut in with a “but”.

Flat Vassal: “But can’t the Far East contain a population increase like that?”

Worshiper: “The farmland and environment needed for the Far East’s rice crops and the other nations’ wheat crops are different. When the population explodes, the land needed to feed them and produce other resources will also grow. ...But whose farmlands will be placed closer to the cities? And what

happens when one nation clashes with another over expanding their farmlands? It will introduce a great number of problems.”

Silver Wolf: “The amount of farmland will be growing while under double rule. That will create expanding national borders, but the Peace of Westphalia determines the international borders... Once that happens, it will be difficult to make later expansions to accommodate a growing population. ...*And that will lead to nations seeking land outside of the Far East.*”

Vice President: “Yes. That is how population growth will lead to the end of the provisional rule.”

Scarred: “Judge. That is why the other nations, even those in the Far East, have not forgotten about finding ways to live in harsh environments. They are researching it and running tests on a daily basis.”

Righteousness: “Then...this city project in Mogami must be part of that research.”

Once she thought about it, Suzu realized Sendai Castle probably was too.

Silver Wolf: “Hexagone Française has created a major force of nonhumans like my mother and works hard at developing automatons and gods of war, but that is not just so they can fight.”

Uqui: “The Catholics are a little behind on that, though. ...On the other hand, the Protestants have more freedom in spell usage and church forces, so they should have an easier time of heading into the outside world.”

Bell: “Urquiaga-kun...shouldn’t you be playing your game?”

Uqui: “Ambassador Mukai, I try to keep my priorities in order. Yes, I already completed the elder sister character’s route, so I can spare some time for this.”

Almost Everyone: “What kind of priorities are those!?”

He really is amazing, thought Suzu before tilting her head and asking a question.

Bell: “Will we...run out of room? Will we have to...say goodbye?”

For example, Mary and Tenzou would eventually go to England where a historical role awaited them. The same was true of Gin and Muneshige with

Tres España. There were other people she had met and others she knew even if she had never spoken with them.

Bell: “Will we never see them...again?”

Me: “Hmm. Bell-san, if anything, I think we should say they’re going home.”

Bell: “Going home...?”

She heard Horizon saying “That’s right.”

Hori-ko: “If they have a home to return to and there is an attractive place to gather together, those who go home will also gather together once more. ... Think of it like a restaurant, a school, or a park.”

So is it like our bathhouse? wondered Suzu.

There were regular customers and there were first-time customers. Some would say they would be back yet never return, while others would say nothing yet be back the same day every week. Some would bring their families with them, while others would always come alone.

When she had asked her father about the people who never returned, he had said, “We just need to keep believing that they’ll be back and maintain a place that lets them do so.” And waiting for them to come by was not the only option.

Scarred: “And can’t Musashi go out and visit those other nations, Acting Captain?”

Bell: “...Would that make things...exciting?”

Mal-Ga: “Making it too exciting would make us a nuisance and they might view it as harassment.”

Gold Mar: “Judge. The Musashi can change the weather just by being there.”

Asama: “Okay, okay. Let’s not ruin this moment!!”

“But,” started Naomasa.

Smoking Girl: “Back in the Age of Dawn, the people started following the Testament because overpopulation led to a territorial war. If this double rule continues, people might worry we’re headed in that direction again. It would even be possible to use the Testament as a justification for it.”

Asama: “I don’t think we should use the threat of a territorial war like that, though...”

But Suzu more or less understood what Masazumi was doing. Most likely, she was not just thinking of getting through the current situation. The Vice President in their class was doing something more.

...She’s thinking about what comes after world domination.

She was thinking about what came after they conquered the world and retrieved Horizon’s emotions. She was thinking about what came after peace filled the world, Toori became a king, and their wishes came true. Masazumi’s actions were meant to look to that future, grasp it, and give it a believable form. And then Suzu heard Masazumi speak.

Vice President: “How about that?”

She said it.

Vice President: “I’ve canceled out your two Xs for #1 through #3. ...That mean’s my argument is safe.”

Masazumi listened to everyone’s silence in the gentle wind.

She kind of liked the silence. She was trying to guide these people down the same path as her and she felt this showed they were expecting something from her and supported her. So...

“Now I will respond to your complains on our initial objective. I stated our objective is to **‘take back the Far East’s status and achieve peace by retrieving the Logismo Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse’**. That led to retrieving Vicereine Horizon at Mikawa and it leads to Musashi creating the Far East afterwards. It is a necessary objective. Also...”

Also...

“This is indeed too much for Musashi to accomplish on its own. That is why we need help from the other nations. The world will be placed under Matsudaira’s rule and the other nations will return to their proper places. ...We will do what we are meant to do and return things to the way they are meant to

be. That is what the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers wish for."

With that, Masazumi opened a sign frame. It displayed her goal and policies with the rejections rebutted.

● **Vice President: Resistance Side**

Objective: Take back the Far East's status and achieve peace by retrieving the Logismo Oplo and stopping the Apocalypse.

O: This justification began with the retrieval of Vicereine Horizon and it is continuing even now.

O: Because it is too much for Musashi alone to accomplish, we will need help from the other nations.

1: Stop Hashiba.

O: We lost to Hashiba as part of the history recreation. There are no further similar opportunities.

O: To stop Hashiba is to preserve the history recreation, so the other nations are obligated to help.

2: Give the Musashi the ability to fight and use that power to cooperate with the other nations.

O: Most battles in the history recreation are with powerful nations and we can gain the cooperation of those powerful nations.

O: As long as Musashi forms relationships with the other nations, it can continue to exist.

3: End the provisional rule and request the expansion of the world at the Peace of Westphalia.

O: Cooperation from the other nations is guaranteed and we are already acting on that assumption.

O: The end of the provisional rule will begin with Matsudaira's rule, so it

follows the Testament.

“How about that? Musashi can gain influence by maintaining an equal position with and cooperating with the other nations. We are prepared to put up the necessary resistance and we have already finished our greatest ‘loss’. From here on out, we will be the ones rising to supremacy. You don’t all have to believe this. But...”

Masazumi placed a hand on her chest.

“But please think of it as natural, the usual, and exactly what we have always done.”

“Pure demagoguery.”

Ookubo spoke in a surprisingly quiet voice next to her.

Ookubo spoke quietly, but her voice had not lost its power.

Because it was quiet and did not spread, it seemed to fly out like something visible. And it flew toward Masazumi.

They had not looked at each other much, but that had changed. Ookubo was facing Masazumi.

...Here it comes.

“Vice President.”

Her voice was quiet yet the words were clear. Most likely...

...She’s serious.

Masazumi saw a debate as a duel of arguments. She had managed to protect her own argument, so she knew perfectly well what was coming next.

Instead of their arguments, they would be exchanging blows based on their position in politics as individuals.

She had proven her reasoning was trustworthy, so now it was time to judge if she could be trusted to face those politics.

“Let’s hear what you have to say, Ookubo.”

Masazumi faced Ookubo.

The people watched and listened. The Representative Committee Head looked up at the Vice President through her glasses.

“Your reasoning is fine. It is a forward-looking way of thinking. And the people of Musashi must like hearing a VIP expressing her support of what they want to believe in. ...But that is demagoguery.”

The Representative Committee Head dropped the stole from her shoulders. She removed the left sleeve of the long-sleeved inner suit shirt she wore below it.

“Do you remember the shell we took before arriving at England?”

She revealed her left arm all the way up to the shoulder.

“I can tell you what happens when we go to war.”

Her left arm was a white prosthetic.

Ookubo remembered. She could still speak on those memories.

She had recorded and reflected on the memories to make sure she would not beautify them or corrupt them.

The area hit by the shell had received largescale damage, but most of the workers had been unharmed. That was because she had urged them to evacuate. She had simply failed to escape in time.

She felt that was her own mistake. She understood that and she had simply gone in too deep.

What was she supposed to say about it?

She had been injured while on official business. As a public servant, she had been prepared for this, so she had only needed to receive compensation from the public and call it settled. However...

...This could have happened to a normal citizen instead, you know?

There was something she wished to ask.

She had inherited two names and stepped onto the public stage.

But even she had been injured during the course of war.

“We have the Testament. We do, but...the Testament won’t protect us.”

She had decided to earn her two inherited names and to do the best she could.

Her father had an inherited name, but he had quit of his own accord. That was why she had wanted to do the best she could.

She had been plenty proud of her two inherited names.

But Mikawa had been lost and the situation had greatly changed.

The other nations became enemies and everything had constantly been on the move. It had been a series of battles and debates. They had been shorthanded, so she had done all the odd jobs and anything else that could help Musashi.

And yet she had not been protected.

When the Tres Españan shell had hit, she had found herself in a scrambled mess of blacked-out hearing and vision.

At first, she had thought her back had hit the wall. She had thought her left shoulder felt hot.

But in truth, she had simply lost her left arm.

When she had started searching around to see if she had dropped it somewhere, a horribly rational thought had come to her.

...I have an inherited name. How can I prioritize myself over others?

So while holding her left shoulder, she had searched for the injured. She had seen no one in the middle hull section. Inside, workers were adjusting the output of the damaged section and they had been the ones to find her.

...I passed out.

Isn't it strange?

I have an inherited name. I have two, in fact. So I wanted to work harder than the average person. I went where it was dangerous, I got hurt, and I lost something. But I still had my inherited names, so I couldn't just run away. Yes, so I did my very best...

...But I didn't get back what I lost.

"Hey," she asked. "What good is a Testament that toys with people's lives like this?"

"Hey," Ookubo said again. "History might be determined in advance...but destiny won't protect us."

It really is strange. I have two inherited names, so shouldn't destiny protect me twice as much? I'm protecting history twice as much, so shouldn't it return the favor?

And if that isn't how it works...

"Why bother doing anything? No matter what we do and no matter how hard we try, destiny will use us as its plaything and hurt us. We're just leaving it up to luck. Besides, whatever Hashiba might do, it'll only last until the Apocalypse, right? In that case, won't victory fall in our laps even if we just sit tight until Westphalia? ...And yet here you are talking about cornering Oda and Hashiba in such a short timeframe..."

She said it.

"What will you do if you end up like me?"

Masazumi faced Ookubo's words. And she felt relief in her heart.

...No sign frames are popping up.

No one was saying anything.

...I can trust that isn't because they're all avoiding this situation.

They were just letting her handle it. The people and her classmates were letting her handle it as Musashi's primary politician.

“———”

I see, thought Masazumi. I'm just about feeling fulfilled here.

That was why the idiot was not saying anything. Yes, that was why...

...It's all right.

She looked directly at Ookubo and spoke. She felt this had to be her answer to their loss at Mikatagahara as she opened her mouth and definitely formed the words.

“That must have been painful.”

But...

“It's all right. ...It doesn't matter how many times it takes, what form it takes, or if someone else has to carry on for you.”

Yes.

“If we continue supporting each other, we can maintain the resolve to continue resisting.”

Masazumi reached her right hand out toward Ookubo.

But she saw an action born of a human will. Ookubo raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth.

“What is that!?”

It was unclear if the tremor in her voice was anger or sadness, but she shook her head.

“That hurts, you know!? Don't act like you understand! If you had actually been hurt-...”

Masazumi looked to the people below. She raised her fingers and moved them as if keeping a beat.

“Okay, time to check!”

“Eh?”

Well, I can go this far, right? thought Masazumi as she held her arms up as if

to tackle the other girl.

“Here goes!”

She suddenly grabbed Ookubo’s skirt and pulled it down.

Chapter 65: Decisive One at the Peak

第六十五章

『頂上の決意者』



強さとは
何の裏返しだろう
配点（抵抗の先）

What is strength

The reversal of?

Point Allocation (Destination of Resistance)

Ookubo did not know what had happened.

She could tell her hips felt lighter. That was because her side skirts had been forced off of the hard points there.

What had contained the body heat around her hips and legs was gone and those parts of her body felt defenseless.

“————”

She suppressed a scream. That was not what the Representative Council Head or a name inheritor would do. Yes, her skirt had been removed and that was all.

But, she thought. Why did this humiliation happen?

...What is this?

“Oh, sorry, Ookubo. I’m not used to this so I held on too hard.”

When she heard that, Ookubo looked down.

At the lower stomach of her inner suit, the panties portion had been removed from the left and right attachments and then fallen down between her legs. It was still attached on the butt side, so it swung down like a pendulum.

...Eh?

The tights had been pulled down a little, but in case there was an attack, she had worn panties below as a supporter. The Vice President looked back at her and breathed a relieved laugh.

“That’s good. Women’s style string panties? Those don’t sell very well, do they?”

“Kyaaaaaaaaah!!”

Ookubo brought her knees together, stuck her hands between her legs, and crouched down.

Asama: “Umm, I mostly get why you did that, but Ookubo-san probably has normal sanity levels and low insanity resistance levels, so it might be better not to push her too far.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. Your mistake was thinking you could do it without practicing first! Come on over to our place sometime. You can use Asama and Mitotsudaira for practice! We can even get my foolish brother to crossdress!”

Mal-Ga: “Oh? You’ve piqued my interest with this talk of practice. ...I think you could learn a lot, Masazumi, so just do what you see in my drawings.”

Vice President: “Why do I have such a hard time agreeing with anything you people say!?”

Ookubo fixed her inner suit while crouching.

Her hands were trembling so much she had trouble attaching the panties portion on both sides.

...Honestly.

Her prosthetic arm was too well made. They had attempted regenerative treatment for the arm, but that had failed and they had remade it into a prosthetic in the process. The problem was how it was shaken by her emotions like this.

But the Vice President stood in front of her to hide this.

“Ahh.” The Vice President scratched her head. “Sorry.”

If you’re just going to apologize, how about not doing it in the first place?
But...

“Ookubo.”

Ookubo did not ask what she wanted. That was because the surprise had brought tears to her eyes and her trembling throat threatened to send those tears spilling out.

Honestly, when did this start? When did I get so tearful? But...

...*“That must have been painful.”*

She felt she had grown too soft. After all, she had been moved to emotion just because someone had agreed with her weakness.

But the Vice President said more while still holding out her hand.

“Don’t worry about it. This is normal for Musashi’s Student Council. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“————”

Wait, she thought. *What was that?* she also thought. She wanted to say something, but she could not get the words out and the Vice President spoke calmly instead.

“I’m not going to reject what you’ve said. As the top of Musashi’s political side, I will take into consideration what a fellow politician like you says, work it into my plans if necessary, and do something else if not necessary. ...As a politician, you must know that choosing or rejecting your own opinion is part of the job. So...”

She had her anteater open a sign frame. It displayed the suggestions Ookubo had made, but the Vice President added her own words.

●Ookubo: Anti-War Side

Objective: Without fighting, return the Far East to its pre-Battle of Mikawa state and reacquire peace.

“I want to stick to anti-war policies as much as possible. And after recovering the Far East’s position in the world, I want to return the Far East to the course of history continuing from Mikawa and have peace.”

1: Negotiate an alliance with Hashiba and P.A. Oda and then advance the history recreation according to the Testament Union’s instructions.

“If we are to hasten Hashiba and Oda’s history recreations, negotiations will be necessary. Rather than bind ourselves with an alliance, I wish to prioritize negotiations that seek the proper forms of our nations, even if that means battle.”

2: Store the Musashi in the Ariake and use its presence to deter an attack on the Far East.

“Once the Musashi has done what it needs to do, it would indeed make an excellent deterrent in the Ariake or wherever else it might be.”

3: Reject all combat and achieve our goals such as retrieving the Logismoi Oplo through peaceful discussions at the Peace of Westphalia.

“Opposing war will be our standard position. And I agree Westphalia is where this dispute will be settled.”

The Vice President added a “listen” before continuing.

“Ookubo, the plan you want is mostly consistent with ours. We can include your thoughts in our plan. That is why we will support you however many times it takes. And all you need to do is help us in the places where your plan fits with ours.”

She smiled as she said one more thing.

“We would appreciate it if a name inheritor like you sided with the Student Council. ...Can you do that?”

Ookubo sighed in her heart.

...I can't believe this.

Her opponent had said they would include her thoughts in their plan, that they would support her, and that they would appreciate having a name inheritor with them.

...And this girl has done more than that...

Yes, that was right. It was not that Ookubo had forgotten or that she had not noticed.

This girl had once literally carved away a part of her body.

It had been in order to inherit a name, but Mikawa's national policies had not allowed it to happen. It had not been her fault, but the future she had planned for herself had been snatched from her by a power she was helpless to fight.

“How...?”

The trembling words just barely escaped Ookubo’s mouth.

“How can you keep going...?”

After having so much taken from her, this girl had not given up and she had kept going. She had to have nearly given in or given up along the way. She was only human, so she had to have been angry.

But the Vice President made a sudden movement. She had the anteater on her shoulder close the sign frame and then she spoke so only Ookubo could hear.

“The problem is...I did think about only taking it partway.”

“...Eh?”

“Judge. Until Mikawa, that is. But...there was a troublesome idiot there.”

As for what kind of idiot it was...

“That idiot’s own mistake led to him losing something important to him and he could never forget what had happened, but he somehow managed to keep moving forward. He had to have nearly given in or given up countless times...no, I think he had to have people laughed at him, mock him, scold him, and try to ‘kill’ him more times than I can know.”

But...

“That idiot is everyone’s ally. He’ll head out to save someone, even if he has to do it alone.”

“—————”

“You went alone to the scene of the shell hit, didn’t you? I know all about that.”

She reached out her hand. Ookubo was crouching, so she could not escape.

But as Ookubo twisted her body as if to avoid the light...

“Come here.”

She took Ookubo’s left hand and then her right hand.

“You’re on our side, Ookubo.”

She held Ookubo’s hands, wrapped her own hands around them, and pulled.

“...Ah.”

Ookubo was pulled to her feet. Her vision rose and she could see the Musashi stretching into the distance down below.

“...!!”

All of the people were raising their arms and voices.

“...!!!!”

Cheers and cries of joy blended together into an incomprehensible roar.

But, thought Ookubo.

...Yes.

These people also had something they wanted to do and they wanted someone to acknowledge that.

There was something the people of Musashi needed to do.

“We’re leaving port. Once tonight’s three nations meeting is over, we’re leaving port.”

The Vice President’s voice was not too quiet and not too loud, but it carried into the distance.

Ookubo realized something as that girl held her hands: That smiling voice and face were a sign that this girl was serious.

She had seen it before, but she felt as if she had not seen it lately.

So had she drawn it out of the girl?

...That must have been painful.

Workers from the engine division were among the crowd down below. If they had been injured back then, Ookubo would be hurting now.

But the Vice President was different. In the Battle of Mikatagahara, they had

lost some important leaders who might have become future allies. That had to have hurt. But...

“...”

The Vice President said nothing. She simply faced everyone with her first powerful smile since then. That may have been why Ookubo felt something fall from the corners of her eyes to her cheeks.

She did not stop it.

Even if she had an inherited name or led the Representative Committee, destiny would not protect her.

Destiny would not protect anyone.

So at the very least, Musashi had taken that fact into consideration as they accepted what they were doing here.

“————”

Ookubo looked to the unseen sky beyond the Ariake’s closed ceiling.

And she quietly but audibly cried.

A moment later, just as the special student general assembly ended, something arrived unexpectedly.

It was in the air.

A few figures appeared without warning in the sky above Musashi Ariadust Academy’s bridge.

They dropped down to the site of the confrontation.

They were automatons cobbled together from various components and materials.

There were three in all, they held blades in their hands, and...

“...!”

They all charged toward Ookubo and Masazumi.

Chapter 66: Fake Ones at a Place of Passage

第六十六章

『渡り場の偽物』



それは元を持たず
心持たず
ただ動きだけを持つ
配点(傀儡)

It has no origin

It has no heart

It simply has motion

Point Allocation (Puppet)

The first to notice was Muneshige back toward the school building.

...An attack!

There was no question in his mind with this presence and these movements. If this was not an attack, there was something wrong with his intuition. This was a hostile action, just like the thrust of a blade.

The figures jumped down from above.

There were three. Muneshige could tell one was larger and the other two were skinny.

“I am on my way!”

With that, he leaped toward Ookubo and Masazumi as if slipping below the three figures.

He spread his arms to protect those two from the sky and he heard Kanou’s footsteps as she ran up from the stairs in the back.

He turned around and held Kamenuki up defensively.

A moment later, three blasts split the air as they flew in from the ship’s bow.

...The 3rd Special Duty Officer!!

Naito was sniping them from her position on top of Musashino’s bridge and her shots hit.

“...!”

But the three figures were only bent and not broken by the impacts.

Gold Mar: “It didn’t even damage them!? What’s going on, Ga-chan!?”

Mal-Ga: “Judge. Maybe the enemy has finally built some anti-Asama level

defenses!”

Tachibana Wife: “I don’t think that’s possible.”

Gin is so quick-witted even in a crisis! rejoiced Muneshige while looking to the enemy.

They had arrived suddenly above him and the other bodyguards.

And they had entirely negated the sniper shots that had hit them as they jumped in. He realized why this was: “These are string-controlled automatons!”

As Gin stood halfway up the stairs and focused on the area below, Kanou ran past her and saw what the enemy was.

...Automatons!?

She was also an automaton, but she had mostly biological parts and looked nearly human.

But the enemy was different. They had a special system that allowed them to take sniper shots without being destroyed.

“Their movements are controlled by strings, so did they use that to absorb the impact!?”

Their primary components could be found anywhere on the Musashi at the moment.

They were made of wood, metal, cloth, as well as the tabletops and frames to the desks and chairs in the schools. There were even parts that looked like brooms, rags, and wastepaper baskets.

They were cobbled together into a humanoid form, and...

...They’re moved by strings.

They were extremely thin fibers. Most likely, they were an animal material, not a plant one. Silk would work, but they would want something closer to muscle fiber. The enemy was using those extremely flexible strings to control them, and...

“They were given autonomy to make them automatons instead of mere

dolls!”

The technique behind them was a level above those Tachibana Muneshige had defeated the night before. Due to the components used, Kanou had inferior durability, but she had the upper hand with her light weight and her mobility.

“Here I come!”

What had been bent by the sniper shots were only masses of strings and basic materials.

They were now preparing to land by retaking their shape in midair as if tensing their bodies. Two of them were skinny wooden automatons. The third wore a ship’s canvas as a cloak and hood, and...

...A woman with two swords!?

The woman drew her swords. She held a metal pipe in each hand.

But...

“———”

She used gravitational control to crush them both into blades.

This gravitational control was a spell. Several disposable Shinto spell charms fluttered down from below her cloak, but the wooden dolls on either side formed blades in the same way.

“———!”

The three of them crouched low and charged forward.

On the school’s roof, Naruze determined what the enemy was and exhaled.

The scene below was less than twenty meters away, and...

...This is probably an attack on the winner of the special student general assembly!

She started to stand up in order to jump down and help, but she lowered her hips again and crouched down further.

She did not head out to intercept. The others there could handle it without her, so she needed to focus on their surroundings.

“Burning Surroundings!”

Naruze opened her observation spell horizontally around her. It was all drawn in based on a line drawing of the scenery.

Mal-Ga: “ ‘Musashino’! I’m going to send you some data, so check over it! We need to locate anyone lurking in the shadows around here!”

Musashino: “Thank you for the favorable viewpoint. To be honest, the rest of the captain automatons and I have a fundamental lack of understanding when it comes to suspicious passengers who are not stowaways. Over.”

“Thanks,” said Naruze as she looked down again.

The three automatons were pursuing Masazumi and Ookubo who were falling back and Muneshige who was protecting those two.

But Naruze saw someone else in the bottom of her vision: Oriotorai.

She was the special student general assembly’s supervisor and their homeroom teacher, but she had not reacted at all to the attack.

Why not? wondered Naruze before realizing the answer. Something was drawn in ink on the canvas worn by the female model automaton.

...The six coins!?

Naruze knew what that was.

...The emblem of Sanada Academy!

That immediately reminded her of the Sanada Ten Braves. It also reminded her that the Ten Braves had a position above Special Duty Officer in Sanada, so they had the right to challenge Vice President Masazumi to a duel.

In that case, this attack was a duel started by Sanada.

This was an official conflict between academies, so there was nothing Oriotorai could do. The special student general assembly was over, so this was not interfering with that either.

They thought this through, thought Naruze. And then...

“!?”

The ink emblem on the canvas vanished in a flash of light. When an armor panel for an elevated location was marked, special construction paint was used so it would vanish on its own and no one would have to go up there and erase it.

That meant only Naruze and Oriotorai had seen the evidence that Sanada Academy was behind this.

Then further movement reached the bridge. Kanou had run up from the stairs.

As soon as the dark-skinned automaton reached the top of the stairs, she kept her body low and faced straight ahead.

“Provisional Vice Chancellor’s Aide! Take Lady Ookubo and the Vice President and fall back!”

She charged straight toward the enemy.

Naruze saw Kanou rush toward the enemy as a counterattack.

She was unarmed, but she moved toward the enemy on the left.

...What is she trying to do?

She was not using a spell. An automaton would have difficulty using a spell powered by Internal Blessings. But she did raise her left hand in front of her face.

“...!”

Kanou fired what looked like a cannon blast.

A tremor of the air surrounded what was launched from Kanou’s arm and it flew straight toward the automaton on the left.

“———!”

The automaton’s response was not to dodge.

The skinny automaton made of wood and strings loosened the strings of its

joints to absorb the impact.

Its body bent from the wind pressure of the object flying toward it. It swayed like a dried leaf dancing in the wind, but...

“...!?”

A split second later, the automaton’s entire body was slammed into the school building.

Kanou’s attack had hit. On top of that, it had captured the automaton and thrown it back into the school’s wall.

As the Public Morals Committee Head, she was equipped with means of capturing an opponent.

This automaton had avoided a sniper shot from Margot, so how had Kanou captured it and gotten the impact through to it?

...What is that?

When Naruze heard a sound like a surface being tightly stretched, she realized what had happened and what had done it.

“A false arm fired with gravitational control!?”

Kanou had already taken her next action.

As the Public Morals Committee Head and as Ookubo’s aide...

...I must face our enemies.

But carrying a gun would be inappropriate for one standing by a politician’s side. And a sword would not stand out when Ookubo carried two herself as a status symbol.

But since automatons had trouble with spells...

“Using my own body as a weapon was the only option.”

She used her remaining right hand to pull a spare left arm from beneath her skirt and to toss it into the air.

As she turned back toward the other two automatons which were already

passing her by, she used her gravitational control to stop the left forearm in midair.

These projectile arms were special made. The wrist was synchronized with her vision and direction-calculation system, so its targeting matched her gaze.

She set her sights.

Her target was the other skinny automaton. The female model with dual swords was more powerful, but it was all about doing things in the proper order.

So she raised her upper arm.

“Fire!”

And swung it down like flint at the floating elbow of the forearm.

A moment later, the second shot was ignited.

“...!”

The projectile arm flew along a twisting course toward the torso of the skinny automaton trying to attack Ookubo and the Vice President.

The automaton reacted as the arm whipped up the wind. It too tried to endure the blow by letting its entire body bend, but...

“————”

As if tearing away the strings and other components, the arm grabbed ahold of it and pushed it out into the air.

A moment later, it stabbed into the ground at the base of a tree on one end of the port side schoolyard.

That just left one enemy. It was the female model with dual swords. Kanou knew what she had to do.

...I have to use him.

She gave a shout, deciding this was a good opportunity.

“Come on out, Yagyu!”

Looking back and shouting proved unnecessary. She could already see the

result behind her.

She saw the color blue. The canvas had scattered like dry leaves in the air.

...Did he break right through her!?

The dual sword automaton had been hit from straight ahead by a striking weapon that had charged in between her and Muneshige.

...Is that...?

As the Tachibana Husband protected her with his entire body, Masazumi saw the sudden arrival of someone short.

They were young enough to be called a boy and he was an underclassman.

But this boy had more than just his short body as a weapon.

“A hammer!?”

She knew who this was. He had been mentioned in Neshinbara’s divine mail that Shakespeare had sent her.

...Ookubo and Kanou work with a skilled underclassman you isn’t really a ninja or a samurai.

He would eventually become an Oniwaban spy for the Matsudaira clan. He would be the head of their intelligence agency and their sword instructor. It was the Tachibana Husband and not Masazumi herself who shouted the family name.

“That divine weapon... Are you a Yagyuu!?”

“That’s right!” shouted the boy. His short hair shook from his powerful movements.

“I have the name of Yagyuu Munenori as a provisional inherited name! And my weapon is...”

He swung the weapon that had already captured his opponent with a spatial strike.

“Pierce them, Kanazuchi!!”

The light of heated golden ether surrounded the giant hammer as it censured the air.

The impact spread and ruptured the object that had received a direct hit.

That meant the blue canvas and the dual sword automaton inside.

The impact ran through the face, arms, torso, and legs, causing them all to tremble, split, and tear apart from within.

The components burst and the strings snapped, but they hit the canvas that still kept its form.

“———”

The canvas spread out for just a moment, but then it burst into pieces from the components stabbing into it from within.

The scattering blue did not just surround the decelerated components. It also flew through the air, decorated the sky...

“Hunterrerrrrr chance!!”

...spread out, and flew about their surroundings.

Gin nodded at the noise she heard up the stairs behind her.

Anyone with a certain level of skill would be familiar with the Yagyuu clan thanks to the sword fighting magazines. That was the type of clan it was and Gin was no exception.

...After the Ono clan was removed as Matsudaira's sword instructor, the Matsudaira clan chose the Yagyuu clan to run their guard organization that doubled as an intelligence agency.

The sword techniques of the Ono clan had been combat techniques from the Warring States period, but as Matsudaira faced an age of peace, they had likely wanted an organization with the ninja techniques of information warfare and the like.

Once she thought about it, Gin realized this Yagyuu boy must have interfered in the attacks on the Secretary and the Vice Chancellor.

When the Secretary had been stamped into the wall, he had likely been attacked by this same dual sword automaton.

The Secretary had been cornered, so Munenori had caused the materials to collapse to save him.

Which meant...

...The Representative Council Head's group must have been vaguely aware the Secretary and the others were under attack.

But due to the upcoming special student general assembly, they had needed to be cautious about getting close. So during the second attack on the Vice Chancellor, Munenori had quickly intervened, gotten in the enemy's way, and saved the Vice Chancellor's life.

"I see."

Why had the Vice Chancellor returned to the Blue Thunder after her first attack?

That would be because the Ono clan was cooperating with Yagyuu.

This also explained the change to Ookubo's expression when they had falsified the information on the Vice Chancellor's attack. Ookubo had sent Munenori in to save her, so she had been confused by the false information. In that case...

"This is quite simple. ...The Representative Council Head's group was on our side all along."

Whether or not Matsudaira would conquer the Far East had yet to be settled at this point in history, so the Ono clan's very existence was not exactly clear, yet Yagyuu, the next generation, was already taking action.

"Master Muneshige, the current age is telling us to hurry down from the stage."

And...

"This is over, Master Muneshige. That was an excellent decision. Also..."

Gin continued facing forward and bowed toward the people on the road and

park.

“Please take care of Musashi Ariadust Academy Provisional Vice Chancellor’s Aide Tachibana Muneshige.”

After bowing, Gin raised her head and exhaled.

The people below looked around and exchanged glances before looking up and raising their arms.

“...!”

They gave another cheer. The wind carried the scattered blue canvas away, but by this point, the people had to understand what had happened. However...

...Master Muneshige handled this well.

So had the 4th Special Duty Officer up above.

They had not carelessly moved forward to pursue the enemy.

Muneshige had stayed back to protect the Vice President and Representative Council Head as their bodyguard. His job was to protect them and ensure they came back alive, not to intercept the enemy. If the enemy was going to escape, he would let them. And if it came to it, he would act as a barrier against the enemy’s attacks.

In an emergency, Gin or Kanou would move forward and buy enough time for Muneshige to get the VIPs away.

The Public Morals Committee Head had called on Yagyuu rather than relying on Gin.

“Was that so you could reveal everything here?”

In that case, thought Gin.

This has removed all of our concerns.

Thanks to the special student general assembly...

“Musashi has no more secrets and has become one.”

The special student general assembly was complete.

Asama knew that an attack had occurred as soon as it ended. And yet...

...*Wow.*

She was riveted to the spot by the scene before her.

Kimi was dancing along the scaffolding. And she was no longer using the slow and powerful movements she had used before.

Kimi was making a single “dance” out of contradictory movements: instant and stagnant, quick and leisurely, direct and indirect. After a gentle rotation of her arms, she would make an instant leap. After a gentle landing, she would make a rapid crawling movement using a single toe tip.

From one movement to the next, Kimi’s dance demonstrated great variety.

...*She’s definitely in a good mood.*

Her footwork was intense, but it looked calm at first glance because it all flowed together.

Futayo was overwhelmed by that footwork and movement. After all, Kimi was continually sending her flying through the air and pulling her back in.

“Is she going to be okay?”

As Asama asked that, she heard a solid sound. It was the sound of Futayo being launched skyward.

That tone never seemed to end.

Chapter 67: Real Ones at a Place of Passage

第六十七章

『渡り場の本物』



回る回る
世界は回らず自分も回らず
ただ心の移ろう周回運動
配点（復帰）

Spin around and around

The world does not spin and you do not spin

But the changes to your heart do

Point Allocation (Comeback)

Asama watched the “dance” that was Kimi’s attack.

Her attacks were nothing more than steps.

Just as Futayo took a step, she would take a step of her own.

...Is it something like the deashibarai in judo?

Sending an opponent flying did not require an attack exceeding their weight. One only had to read their line of movement, and...

“Trip the axis of their body or limbs. It’s the opposite of escorting your partner in a dance. By tripping their axis, their own power loses balance and sends them flying.”

As Yoshiki explained next to Asama, a great sound rang out and Futayo floated up into the air.

But Kimi reached out an arm, forcibly pulled the girl back, and...

“———!!”

Threw her again.

Kimi once more collected Futayo from the air and took her hand. She pulled her back and threw her away again, but this time she held onto her collar, spun her around, swung her around, threw her, continued spinning to catch up, and made a counterattack.

She never stopped.

Asama could not help but comment on the movements and noise.

“This is a new song of Kimi’s.”

“She really needs to study more instead...”

She sure is a strict mother, thought Asama, but the impacts and sounds of a body flying through the air continued.

This dance was undoubtedly following a song. Kimi would eventually complete an official version and ask Asama and Mito to perform it with her.

...She's probably planning to perform it at the school festival...

In the deep blue sky of an early summer afternoon, Kimi made music with the tempo kept using Futayo.

Futayo did not understand what was happening.

She was being knocked into the air, but there was no impact.

She was being knocked into the air, but it was not being forced onto her.

She was being knocked into the air, but she felt no pain.

She was simply hanging in the air like sound.

She was simply flying through the sky like wind.

She was simply floating in the heavens like clouds.

She was being rapidly and repeatedly escorted through changes to her axis and all resistance seemed futile.

If Tachibana Muneshige was naturally gifted with the ability to balance himself, this dancer was naturally gifted with the ability to view other people's balance.

But knowing that...

"...!"

...changed nothing in reality.

Futayo was knocked away and spun around in a soundless current of no tension, power, malice, or wickedness.

Even when she did manage to place her toes or her heel on the scaffolding, her body would immediately be spun on its axis.

How was she supposed to resist this? She had no idea. She could only let

herself be spun, thrown around, and used to keep a tempo.

...Will she not even let me fall!?

Kimi would catch her. When her toes or heels were tossed up from the scaffolding and her arms or shoulders were grabbed to swing her around, her body would straighten, her back would stretch out, and her head would face forward.

That was the axis of her body. It was the line of power that straightened her posture.

Most likely, Kimi was lightly striking that from ahead so the power would pass straight through. It passed through so directly that it used her own body's movements to both straighten her posture and...

“———!!”

...send her flying.

It was a lot like something she already knew. It was just like when Soaring Wings failed and misfired.

And a thought occurred to Futayo.

...Was I really this incapable of controlling myself!?

When using Soaring Wings in the past, she had thought she had linked her movements together.

But this series of steps at such close range led to a different result.

...I can't link anything together!

Her movements were not precisely passing through her axis.

She quickly realized why.

She had never before fought a close-range battle on this level.

Her father had used a spear and Kazuno had naturally trained her on that basis as well. She had been given a fair level of combat training with a sword, but it had mostly been with a spear. And this current battle was even closer range than a spear, sword, or fist. This was on the level of throws and holds.

Soaring Wings and other acceleration spells were not made for situations like this.

That meant using Soaring Wings had no meaning here. Of course it was not working.

“But do I need the skill to pull it off even in this situation!?”

It was not that she did not have to do it because it was not necessary.

She had to be able to do it even if it was not necessary.

And she realized that someone here was trying to make her impossible into the possible.

That person was Aoi Kimi.

She had said she would take Futayo’s right to give up. This was the same.

“Are you going to take away my impossibility!?”

The answer was obvious. That sister and brother took away other people’s impossibilities. That was who they were.

And as she was thrown into the air, Futayo looked to her teacher.

Ono Zenki.

If her husband was Ono Tenzen, then her child would be Matsudaira’s sword instructor, Ono Tadatsune.

Futayo had heard about him from Kazuno. As Matsudaira’s sword instructor, Ono Tadatsune would lead a group of bodyguards that included Tachibana Muneshige as well as establish the major Itto-Ryu school of sword fighting.

If the idiot did not fill that role, then it had to be Kimi.

“Heh heh.”

That girl laughed as her hair danced around her.

“You’re overthinking this. Just to be clear, I received no training at all from my mom. Don’t mistake me for the athletic type. If anything, I’m the cultural type. So if you’re mistaking me for a master swordfighter...”

Then...

“You’re saying the Far East’s master swordfighters can be matched by nothing more than my natural cultural senses.”

Futayo’s vision was flying through the air and her hearing was spinning around, but the voice still reached her.

“Listen. ...I have a dream. And it isn’t just what you see here.”

She added a “so”.

“Respond, warrior girl. I’m willing to teach an ignorant country girl the steps, but a warrior should be able to at least recognize this, right? ...Here, I’ll match our voices and then move out ahead just this once, okay?”

“Huh?”

Futayo’s question was useless and she was caught off guard regardless.

“C’mon. 3, 2, 1...go!”

When she was sent flying this time, Futayo realized something had changed.

She had to preface it with a “most likely”, but...

...Our movements have changed!?

“It’s started...”

Asama instructed Hanami to begin recording and gathering data.

Kimi was using a very un-spell-like spell.

“That’s Kimi’s stage spell, Turning Point.”

While Turning Point was indeed a spell, it was only an acoustic and illumination spell. It provided no divine protections or special effects. All it did was decorate a song and dance.

The sign frames that started up contained the different songs she had written in the past and different adlibbed chord patterns, and they could provide the optimal sound and lighting based on Kimi’s instructions and movements.

...The main defining trait is how light it is.

All the fat had been trimmed in making Turning Point and it was the base of

the other spells Kimi used. Even Summit Dance had been made by adding divine protections and effects on top of this.

But, thought Asama. If Kimi is bringing out Turning Point on its own...

“She’s testing out a song pretty early on.”

“She doesn’t like going for half measures in anything, so it should be fine,” said Yoshiki with a smile. “And she has performed this one at my place before.”

Then a voice reached them. It was Kimi’s voice. The sound of Futayo being sent flying acted as a hand drum’s four-on-the-floor beat and the tempo was around 135.

“Where shall I go tomorrow? I can go anywhere today.

“Where shall I go today? I think I’ll go there.”

The blows to Futayo’s axis rang out and the sky began to give tension to the sound.

It was music. The low beat of a bass drum joined with the melody of strings, but Kimi’s voice remained light.

“I’m going dancing somewhere in the city. Somewhere in the city where you are not.

“I’m going singing. I can go at any time to find you where you will be tomorrow.”

Her voice reverberated through the air.

“I take your hand, and dance, and smile, and make so many selfish requests.

“Let’s meet somewhere again tomorrow too. Give my present self a push forward tomorrow too.”

...This is a trance focused on a high-speed loop.

The song name on the sign frames was Today’s and Yesterday’s Dance. From the sound, it seemed to be based on the Gagaku trance music popularized by Kagami, a band of their upperclassmen who had graduated this year. Their song had been titled Routine, so this may have been an alternate “underclassman” version. Asama felt they would have difficulty performing this song in

Kimitoasamade, their Gagaku band, but this was only the first verse. Still, it sounded nice, and...

“La la...”

Futayo flew through the air as Kimi hummed an interlude, but then Asama saw something.

...Futayo’s movements are changing, aren’t they?

Asama looked over to Yoshiki who crossed her arms.

“This is a large step forward. ...She’s done it by matching the song, but she’s at least falling feet-first now.”

Futayo ran.

The sound guided her.

The song let her run even when she was sent flying and her footing was uncertain.

Running was a series of rhythms. It was the same as using Soaring Wings. But...

...This rhythm!

Kimi had likely chosen a song that matched her movements.

Even when she was spun around or sent flying, she could follow the song’s lead to always land on her feet.

“———”

And she could keep going.

Futayo belatedly realized that Kimi’s right hand held her left hand, the one that did not hold the Tonbo Spare.

That was the girl’s way of escorting her, and...

“Heh heh. Are you ready for the third time around? ...I hope you have a handle on it now.”

Kimi let go.

“Let’s up the tempo. I won’t ask you to follow my lead, but you know what that means, don’t you?”

“Judge.” Futayo nodded. “I will do my best to respond in advance.”

A moment later, Futayo was thrown into the air with even greater speed than before.

Asama was the first to notice because she was monitoring Kimi and Futayo’s Blessings.

...Huh?

Futayo was thrown out into the air and flipping around again and again, but...

“She didn’t use Soaring Wings.”

“She’s redoing it all from the ground up. She’ll use it eventually, but she can get pretty far just with the standard bodily reinforcement divine protections. Futayo-chan was trained to do that.”

Is that how it works? wondered Asama before realizing something.

Asama: “S-see! Since I don’t understand this, it means I have no combat sense! Now who was it calling me a gunner shrine maiden, a sniper shrine maiden, or a genocide shaman!?”

Gold Mar: “Isn’t it way more dangerous if you can cause that much damage without any sense to guide it?”

Mal-Ga: “That’s right, Margot. It’s the results that matter, not your sense. What a dangerous shrine maiden...”

Asama: “You just called me dangerous, didn’t you!? Didn’t you!?”

But Futayo was gradually regaining control of her movements. Kimi had clearly been throwing her out into the air before, but now...

“It looks like she’s spinning herself around.”

“She’s figuring out the locations and meaning of the axis lines that Kimi has been exploiting. From what I can see, her accuracy is poor, but she’s grasping this with some real conviction.”

“Conviction?”

When Asama asked that, Yoshiki’s eyebrows rose and she smiled at the girl.

“I’m talking about her individual style. ...For example, that Tachibana Muneshige boy who joined you lately has a natural sense of balance. Not only can he stand on a blade, but he could probably settle down and live there. His balance is a very ‘polite’ thing and he has a great sense for ‘accepting’ it. If there’s a foothold there, he touches it, reads it, and responds accordingly.”

“What about with Kimi?”

“While she does have the same ‘politeness’, she has more of a sense for ‘providing’ balance. If there’s a blade, she can determine its balance at a glance, but instead of accepting that, she more actively moves in to ride it. She has excellent balance, but she never stays still. She provides her own balance to her opponent and maintains it by continuing the dance.”

And...

“Futayo-chan can’t reach either of their heights.”

What Asama had seen was enough to know that Yoshiki was telling the truth there. Asama gasped a little, but...

“Then what kind of technique is she trying to grasp here?”

“Just watch.”

Futayo took a leap atop the scaffolding. On the outskirts of Kimi’s dance, she spun herself around when sent flying and she was repelled again when she placed her feet on the scaffolding. But...

“She’s gradually developing her own pattern. ...Can’t you tell?”

The corners of Yoshiki’s mouth rose.

“With Shinto acceleration spells like Futayo-chan’s Soaring Wings, you have to continue stringing the acceleration together. Since she has to pave her own path of acceleration, she can’t use the ‘acceptance’ form of balance. She has to ‘provide’ her own balance to make any location into her own path. Also...”

Before Yoshiki could continue, a solid sound rang out.

Kimi had repelled Futayo's axis.

Futayo was knocked back into the sky, but then something changed.

...That was fast!?

Futayo's rotation clearly accelerated.

"They're on the fifth time through the song, so she knows what is coming where. And instead of waiting for the sound and reacting, she's moving out ahead of the music. ...Kimi's doing a good job here. She's made dancing to the music into a way of attacking first. To Futayo-chan, this is a performance of her martial arts forms, but once she is allowed to surpass those set forms, it becomes a real battle with certain limitations in place."

A solid sound rang out. Futayo leaped and spun around.

...Ah.

The girl's hair drew a clean circle for the first time. She had made an undisturbed rotation, which was...

"Futayo's normal movement..."

Futayo realized her body was moving.

...Did I surpass it?

She was following along with Kimi's dance. They had already passed the fifth run-through, so she knew the song and dance perfectly.

But that did not mean she could move ahead of the dance and keep moving.

Kimi was adding some slight alterations to keep Futayo from exceeding her so easily. But in that...

"...!"

Futayo saw her own axis line.

She had learned it all too well after Kimi hit that line and sent her flying time and again.

Where did her strength flow when she took action? How short or long was

the line? She could see that wavering line now.

She understood it.

Her strength moved from her right toes, passed through the front of her ankle, wrapped around her inner shin a little, and slipped below her kneecap. It rose through her thigh, twisted around toward her crotch when moving forward, and wrapped around toward her butt when moving back.

By matching the bending of her joints to that pulsing strength, she could change the thickness and heat of that axis line, but...

...That strength passes through one spot more than any other!

It created a power that pinned her to the ground.

That strength was not released. At the front end of her foot, it travelled directly out and through the floor.

Kimi's attacks were clearly carving into her body on that axis.

"Kimi-dono!"

...Were you preventing me from giving up so you could teach me this!?

In front of her, the dancer was smiling, singing, and dancing.

She seemed to be saying that was all a dancer was meant to do. And...

"Heh heh. Stop making me dance all alone."

Kimi closed her eyes a little in a troubled expression. Futayo realized what those words and that expression meant.

She was telling Futayo to come to her. So Futayo said "judge" with a nod and then used it.

"Soaring Wings!!"

From Asama's viewpoint, only Kimi remained. But...

"...Eh?"

After appearing in front of, next to, or behind Kimi, Futayo would spin and vanish.

Those were already nothing more than afterimages.

...She's all round her!?

As Kimi danced and made long steps along the scaffolding, Futayo pursued her. She used the scaffolding one or two removed from Kimi and then moved in as if being reflected. And of course...

"You need to get closer in than that, Futayo-chan. If you don't, you can't get a step above her. So..."

So...

"Run wild and fast."

Futayo was on the move.

She could hear Kimi's voice. The song's lyrics reached her.

"I take your hand."

Here it is, thought Futayo.

The next line was "and dance". The bass drum sounded near the "d" of the "and" and it matched her own tempo. If she twisted her right leg to leap in at that moment, she had a feeling she could achieve the fastest and optimal angle. Of course...

...It might be nothing more than a feeling.

She might not actually pull it off. She might simply be mistaken.

But she still thought she could pull it off at that "d".

She could trust in this timing more than any other circumstances.

Even if she failed, she could still believe in it and charge in.

So she listened to Kimi's voice and focused on her body's line of motion.

"An-..."

d.

To predict the moment and get ahead of Kimi's movements, Futayo charged in.

Kimi sensed Futayo darting forward atop the scaffolding.

It was a straight-on shot.

It was sharp.

She also used her feet to send her body hopping upwards from the hips.

She predicted when Kimi was going to send her flying and entered a midair front flip on her own.

But Kimi could see Soaring Wings' spell circles on Futayo's feet and knees.

If she made this front flip when Soaring Wings was trying to move her forward, the discrepancy in direction would cause it to fail.

...What is she planning to do!?

Kimi kept her legs dancing as she asked that silent question.

Just like before, she moved in to sweep Futayo's legs out from under her. She would rule the stage and declare this the spot she would stand on next.

At this point, spinning was Futayo's only option.

Would she spin herself and receive Soaring Wings' failure?

Or would she take Kimi's jab at her axis and receive Soaring Wings' failure?

The result was the same. So...

"What are you planning to do!?"

As soon as she asked that, Kimi briefly lost sight of Futayo.

It was not that she had vanished. She had seemingly been starting a front flip, but...

"...!"

Just as her body tilted forward, she swung it backwards and forced herself into a backflip.

Futayo made a backflip while moving forward with great speed.

This was her first time attempting this kind of trick.

It was a simple idea.

If Soaring Wings self-destructed when something stopped it from moving forward, there was only one way to make a jumping dodge.

...I have to keep my legs moving forward as I spin around.

That meant a backflip.

While running forward, she would spin backwards in the air. To do that, she had to pour even more acceleration into her forward-moving legs. Otherwise, her jump would not have the strength needed for a full flip.

The greater her speed, the more inadequate the strength when she made the jump and the more her body would try to move forward. It was even possible she would not gain enough height and her back or head would hit the ground.

But Soaring Wings gave her what she needed.

When she leaned backwards, her thighs and knees pointed upwards, so the sky was “forward”.

...Spin!

She spun.

But her angle was a little off. She was leaning forward as if she had a shallow bend in her knees. But...

“...Soaring Wings!?”

It had not been destroyed. Her acceleration spell was still active. It shined and responded to her call.

<Status: Active...Continuing>

<Continued Accumulation: Possible: Confirmed>

Futayo felt a tremor. It came from her own body and she did not know why. This was nothing more than learning she could still use this familiar spell at such

a low speed.

But this was a first. She had equipped herself with an unknown technique.

“Heh heh. If you have a new move now...then let’s keep going.”

Kimi’s leg flew toward her knee-first. It was trying to sweep her legs out from under her.

Then Kimi saw something.

As she made her roundhouse kick, Futayo tilted her upper body and entered a head-first side flip.

Her body fell sideways in midair and she took a position similar to a backflip as her legs followed her body.

Soaring Wings’ direction was generally based on her torso’s front axis line.

So Kimi watched Futayo move. Futayo leaned her body back first and then adjusted her legs “forward”. By maintaining a twist from the torso to the thighs and then to the knees, she kept Soaring Wings from breaking.

“...!”

The strange side flip was made from a rotation and intersecting twists and she added in a spin to orient her torso forward just before landing.

In that instant, static ran through Soaring Wings and the ether light scattered from it.

But...

“————”

She pulled it off. Futayo stuck the landing.

Kimi saw Futayo pull out ahead of her movements and begin the next action.

But just as Futayo tried to move from her landing, she suddenly lost her balance.

...Oh, dear.

She had just finished a series of unfamiliar actions, but it likely had more to do

with letting her guard down. After all, she had just finished using nothing but her combat sense to get through an extremely difficult action.

Kimi knew what would happen to Futayo's body.

Unable to control her movements, she would hesitate and end up airborne.

Futayo was prepared to fail.

She had let her guard down after clearing two tricky parts in a row.

She had gotten ahead of Kimi's actions and she understood her own axis lines, so this should have been when she began *her own actions*.

But she had lost that first opportunity.

She felt regret.

Of course, her body remembered overcoming those tricky parts. She could use those memories to use Soaring Wings at extreme close range in the future. But...

...This is how I start it off!?

Soaring Wings would shatter and she would be thrown into the air.

I couldn't finish it, she thought while prepared for her failure.

But then...

"Heh heh. Silly girl. Have you forgotten? I've taken away your right to give up."

A moment later, Futayo was thrown into the air, but not by Soaring Wings misfiring.

It was Kimi.

She had swung her hand back and grabbed Futayo's arm.

"...!"

Kimi twisted Futayo's body into the proper form and had Futayo properly land on her feet's axis lines. She was now positioned to take the next step. Namely, moving out ahead of Kimi.

“————”

She felt dazed, she felt confused, and she felt doubt, but at the moment...
...*Oh.*

So I don't have to give up on myself, she thought.

An unexpected tear fell from the corner of her eye at that thought, but...
“Ohhh!”

She used the speed that Kimi had preserved for her.

On the limited scaffolding, she used her full strength to live up to the dancer's expectations.

Loud noises joined the music.

The rapid movement and rotation had whipped up thin clouds around the scaffolding off of the Ariake's western side.

The clouds had no center. That was because the two creating the movement in the middle were racing around the scaffolding, swinging their bodies around to jump from foothold to foothold, pursuing each other, and exchanging steps, hands, and legs.

But there was a difference between the movements of the dancer and the warrior girl.

The dancer moved about and rotated horizontally with bending movements at the center of it all. The warrior girl made a rapid series of vertical and horizontal rotations and made use of piercing lines of motion.

But they were both dancing.

“I take your hand, and dance.”

A loud noise rang out, but...

“And smile.”

The dancer occasionally grabbed the forceful warrior girl's movements and spun her around.

“And make so many selfish requests.”

Once the warrior girl regained control, the standard flow was reestablished.

“Let’s meet somewhere again.”

She continued.

“Tomorrow too.”

She moved in time with the dancer, reached out her hand, had it swept away, and yet used her motion to spin around.

“Give my present self.”

She accelerated.

“A push forward.”

As if to say she could go even further...

“Tomorrow too.”

She continued on.

“Wait, wait. What is this?”

Asama heard the workers speaking as they performed repairs in the vicinity.

She could clearly see what it was they were talking about.

It was a dance.

As Kimi moved around the scaffolding and performed a leaping dance, Futayo seemed to decorate Kimi’s surroundings. And including the afterimages, Futayo’s numbers were in the double digits.

To take Kimi’s hand, they all pursued her and tried to grab at her.

“She can still get away, can’t she?”

A warrior tried to capture a dancer.

Kimi may have been using her dance to symbolize that structure.

Oh, thought Asama.

If this dance represented the narrator of the lyrics Kimi was singing...

...She wants to take someone's hand and lead the way, but she's afraid to.

That was Futayo's role.

She was the child who had no skill, the child who had no self-confidence, and the child who could not take that first step forward.

The person watching over her was trying to reach out a kind hand and to listen to her, but...

"Tomorrow too."

With that, the child rejected it. She felt comfortable and safe with the usual but stagnant desire.

However, that made her unable to catch up to the person whose hand she was trying to take.

"But..."

A loud sound rang out.

The intensity and duration of the sound said it all. Futayo had begun to catch up.

"I take your hand, and dance."

That phrase was repeated ad infinitum. That desire was restated ad infinitum. To make that the "specialty" inside her, the awkward girl awoke to her own movements. And...

"Wait, wait... Hey, you guys!"

The nearby workers called over the others

"Look! This is getting even crazier than at Mikawa!"

A diagram formed in the sky.

Futayo used her weapon's extension device and repeated uses of Soaring Wings to begin drawing a high-speed back-and-forth.

With Kimi at the center, she used the scaffolding at one position removed to

repeatedly leap in from different angles.

Futayo charged in and tried to take Kimi's hand, spun around and tried to move back, and dodged before leaping to another piece of scaffolding.

By repeating this, she created two circles of afterimages. One circle danced right around Kimi and the other accelerated on the outer edges of the scaffolding. They whipped up the wind and the ether light as they matched Kimi's movements and spun around.

"Ohh..."

The people watching were awestruck. They all focused their eyes beyond the bursting clouds and wind to view everything created by Kimi's rotation and the two rings of Futayo.

"It's a compass..."

The compass was spinning. The dancing shrine maiden controlled the spinning of destiny at the center.

"———"

And she distinctly held her hand forward.

Come, that hand said.

This fingertip is the point of the compass.

And so Futayo raced forward.

She poured in all of the speed she had accumulated in Soaring Wings.

"Ohhhh!"

The tip of her spear raced forward to pierce through the dancer.

This will work, thought Futayo.

I can use this direct path to send my spear straight through Kimi.

She did not hesitate to pierce her classmate and teacher with her spear.

If she held back here, she would be looking down on Kimi despite her own

inexperience. So...

“Kimi-dono!!”

With a shout, she thrust her spear forward.

At that very moment, she sensed a certain presence.

“...!?”

I recognize this, thought Futayo.

She did not quite know what *this* was, but she still recognized it.

She recognized the sense of distance, the aura, and the atmosphere.

She had definitely experienced *this* before and “fallen victim” to it.

She sensed danger, so...

“Ohh!!”

She twisted her body in midair. Without stopping Soaring Wings, she forcibly lowered Tonbo Spare.

“Over there!!”

She swung Tonbo Spare to the left, toward the Ariake.

A moment later, light burst from Tonbo Spare’s tip.

A line of light had flown through the air, collided with it, and been intercepted. It came from...

“Asama-dono!?”

Futayo saw it.

Asama was aiming her bow toward her from Ariake’s edge.

She had already fired the arrow and Futayo had intercepted it.

It had been a training shot with no real force behind it.

But Futayo understood exactly what Asama’s shot meant.

“Do you understand?” asked Kimi. “That was a recreation of the Logismo Oplo ‘Pheugos Gastrimargia’ shot that hit you at Magdeburg.”

Futayo quickly arrived at Kimi’s scaffolding and Kimi held a hand out to her.

“Isn’t this great? That will never happen again. ...You just proved it yourself. You weren’t even focused on defense. You were on the attack and moving quite quickly, but not even a surprise attack from an Asama-class shot can get through to you.”

Kimi took her hand, pulled her forward, and gently embraced her.

“Now for your final test.”

“What is that?”

“Judge.” Kimi pushed on her back. “I’m giving you back your right to give up.”

As soon as Kimi said that, Futayo realized she had lost all of her speed from that push on the back.

Soaring Wings vanished, but it did not misfire. By dropping her speed, it lost the support for its power and was neutralized.

And after giving her that gentle inertia, Kimi spoke.

“Don’t give up.”

With that, she pushed Futayo out into the air.

Futayo was shoved from the edge of Kimi’s scaffolding and into the empty space between scaffoldings. She entered freefall.

“———”

Futayo was thrown out into the bottomless sky.

As Asama put away her bow Katatsubaki, she saw Futayo slowly falling.

Kimi bent her hips, held a hand to her forehead, and watched Futayo fall.

Asama felt this sight was a perfectly natural one.

...Oh, she was shoved off.

And after a second...

“Eh!? W-wait! She’s falling!!”

Gold Mar: “Eh? Really!? Sorry, I kind of forgot about that. Ah ha ha.”

“We have to do something! Um, c’mon, Kimi!!”

Kimi did not look back her way. She simply looked down where Futayo had fallen.

“—————”

She tightly clenched her right fist. And then...

“...!!”

A loud noise rang out.

The noise coming from Futayo’s location rang loud in the sky.

Chapter 68: Observer in the Layers

第六十八章

『階層内の展望者』



どうして
私の見る全ては
果てしない
配点（足場）

Why does

Nothing I see

Come to an end?

Point Allocation (Footing)

Futayo felt herself wake up.

But she felt it was different from just waking up from sleep. It was more like being refreshed from her weariness. It was like passing out after intense training but having her body wake up in order to live.

She had experienced this sort of “awakening” a few times in the past. It had happened when her father had woken her by splashing well water on her with a bucket and it had happened when she had come to with her head resting in Kazuno’s lap. But a certain sensation was always the strongest.

...Kh.

Pain.

This awakening felt like her pulse resetting itself after she accumulated so much weariness that she could no longer move a single finger. It was like being pasted to the ground. Her bones seemed to move before her muscles and her muscles creaked like dry branches.

She was dehydrated and her eyes ached when she so much as moved them.

But this painful awakening had always been filled with an image of her father or Kazuno smiling her way.

“Well done.”

She knew exactly why they had said that. When she trained until she collapsed and passed out from exhaustion, it was always when she had grasped some definite results. When learning her spear techniques, acquiring Soaring Wings, or making use of her martial arts, she had worked through the night and over several days until it permeated her body. Collapsing from exhaustion was the sign it was complete. So...

“———”

What would she see when she opened her eyes this time?

Who would she see?

Asama felt Futayo’s head moving on her lap.

Her unbound hair waved gently while her opened eyes tried to focus and stared right past Asama.

“———”

They looked up into the sky.

Asama joined her in looking up at the blue sky with few clouds. And...

“Did you wake up? Heh heh. Or should I say a lovely flower has blossomed? But more importantly and most importantly, I am impressed, Honda Futayo.”

Kimi bent over to peer down at Futayo’s face and she spoke with a smile.

“You did well, samurai girl. You were the type who could make it up here.”

Futayo took a deep breath when she heard that. Her back moved and the space between her tensed shoulder blades grew stiff as she revealed something to Asama.

As she lay on her back, tears dripped from her eyes and toward her ears.

Asama too had experienced unexpected tears like that recently. She did not know if these were from sorrow or joy, but...

...She was moved to emotion.

Futayo then hid her face below her right hand. And...

“...”

Her dry and barely audible voice uttered what may have been an expression of gratitude.

Asama was not sure, but the girl inhaled again and got up. Asama thought she could stand to rest longer, so she looked back and to her right to ask what to do.

“Um.”

Yoshiki had been there before, but she was gone now.

There was no point in wondering when that had happened. It simply meant the woman felt she had nothing more to teach Futayo at the moment.

As Futayo moved away, Asama realized the girl's back and shoulders were surprisingly small.

At the same time, a sign frame appeared next to Asama's face and displayed some text.

Hori-ko: “Asama-sama, I heard Futayo-sama fell into the abyss.”

Asama: “Ohh, she's fine, she's fine. She came back up. ...And it isn't often that you contact me like this, Horizon.”

Hori-ko: “Judge. I heard our divine transmission environment had been set up, so I had to try it out. ...And to be honest, I do have my own form of ‘anxiety’ brought by an automaton's decision-making ability. You could call it the probability of rejection and the fear thereof.”

“So,” she said.

Hori-ko: “Asama-sama, Kimi-sama, Futayo-sama, Manager-sama, and everyone else...please help us avoid any rejections.”

Asama was not the only one to reply with a “judge”.

Futayo stood up, faced forward, and spoke that word of acknowledgment. And...

“I can answer for myself. ...I definitely made it back up here.”

She faced forward.

She continued facing forward with Kimi by her side and supporting her back.

They were about one hundred meters from the western edge of the Ariake. That was less than two hundred meters from the scaffolding that Futayo had fallen from.

As Futayo stared at that distance as if to judge it, Kimi spoke to her.

“Aren’t you scared?”

“O-of what?”

“Heh heh. Perhaps I should give you another shove.”

With a comment of “You really don’t get it?”, Kimi leaned against Futayo’s shoulder and moved her finger as if tracing the fingernail from the scaffolding to here.

“You came all the way here...and all so you could ‘make it back up’.”

Yoshiyasu slowly closed a sign frame as she walked through the multi-layer city with melted snow water falling through it.

She had received a message saying the special student general assembly had ended and the Vice Chancellor and the Chancellor’s sister’s training was over.

A group she could call her upperclassmen had achieved some kind of results. And in response...

...Dammit.

She did not know what that curse was directed at, but she felt a strange sort of anger toward herself. It had been there in her heart since the Battle of Mikatagahara, but it had grown larger and larger since arriving in Mogami.

...Dammit.

What was this deep in her heart and just above her gut? Some sort of gradually growing heat would occasionally give off a faint light like a charcoal fire that refused to go out.

She wanted to grab at it and pull it to the surface, but she also felt like touching it would be dangerous. Unsure what to do, it simply remained a question inside her.

“Heh heh. Satomi...the vassal next to you is worried, you know?”

Yoshiyasu realized her eyebrows and shoulders were tensed and she turned toward the vassal.

“Are you okay, Satomi President? If you’re shocked that the second card you

got was Early Morning Asazuke-Gael, a Gaelic model Origi-Common, then do you want to trade for the Celtic one I got, Three Minute Asazuke-Celt? Mine's a leafy one and I got the Shiso-colored art."

"No, Gael just sounds stronger than Celt if you ask me..."

"I see... Sorry I couldn't be any help. I traded all my common ones away before, so all I have on hand are paste ones..."

The vassal seemed to be mistaken about something, but it had helped put Yoshiyasu in a better mood. Yoshiyasu took a breath and Yoshiaki looked back at her while walking out ahead.

"You're quite the troublesome girl yourself. You let things smolder inside you, don't you?"

There was no point in denying it, so Yoshiyasu nodded.

"Ever since I got here."

"Oh, how splendid."

Yoshiaki made a sudden move. She nimbly turned to the side and held out her fan. A sign frame sat on the tip.

It displayed the dining hall on the starboard side of Musashi Ariadust Academy. And at the moment...

...Fog? No, that's the hidden village's stealth.

The wind around the dining hall could be seen in a white drift that should never have appeared on a summer afternoon.

Fujiwara Yasuhira, representative of Oushuu Hiraizumi, had arrived. The displayed screen contained the caption "The Vice President: Lunch or the Paranormal!? The mystery fog!"

...Don't list lunch and the paranormal together like that.

At any rate, the Vice President and the others would likely begin their discussion with Yasuhira soon.

They were on the move. Until now, they had all been acting individually, but with this meeting, they would all begin moving with the Vice President in the

center.

...No, the Vice President isn't the one in the center.

Everything the Vice President had advocated and supported pointed right back to that idiot.

It pointed back to the idiot that Yoshiyori had told to smile.

The way Yoshiyasu saw it, the Vice President currently stood at the leading edge of Musashi's actions.

But it was that idiot that supported her and everyone else from the very back.

Even when she searched through her memories, she was pretty sure that idiot had always been smiling.

Since arriving at the Ariake, he had been the same as always. His behavior and actions had been the same. *He even peeped, didn't he!?* But that held a certain meaning.

...He hadn't given up and he didn't rush things.

The people had been worried, but they had lived dense and busy lives on the Ariake, there had been commotions, and no one had given up. They had been defeated in battle and lost quite a bit, but that idiot had simply smiled.

He had behaved the same as always so that he would not create any new worries. So...

"Yoshiaki. ...Why do you think this smoldering inside me grew stronger here?"

"Well." The fox smiled and looked at Yoshiyasu through the sign frame.

"Wouldn't it be because you left Musashi?"

Her old self would have found that ridiculous. But...

"Maybe so."

Musashi was different from Satomi. In Satomi, they had stared down Houjou and the various Kantou forces, secured food, strengthened their weapons, and given their all to ensure their own survival. But Musashi performed largescale trade between many nations, possessed a lot of internal culture and

technology, and had a great many people. But most importantly...

“Musashi is at peace.”

“That is partially thanks to the repeated election of the incompetent...for better or for worse.”

“Testament,” she replied while realizing something about that repeated election of the incompetent.

...Has Musashi had that atmosphere for a long time?

There had to be something unique about the current idiot, but that did mean everything had been completely different before him. Just as Satomi had specialized itself toward the survival of a small nation, Musashi had never given up, never rushed things, and yet...

“Hey, Yoshiaki. Do you think a will of resistance is something that everyone has and that never disappears?”

“Anyone from Oushuu could only say yes to that.”

“Judge,” replied Yoshiyasu with a nod.

And that brought something to mind: Yoshiyori.

Yoshiyori. He must have seen Musashi as a place that never gave up, just like Satomi. And as a wonderful place that had peace and did not rush things. But if that was all it was, it would have ended there. After all, Satomi had no peace and was under constant pressure to be on the move. Trying to be Musashi would only lead to ruin.

But that idiot had set Musashi in motion.

Whether he had understood it or not, that idiot had raised his voice of resistance to reject their destiny of loss. But that idiot, still as an idiot, had remained peaceful and never rushed as he began resisting by saving others.

Yoshiyasu did not know if Yoshiyori had predicted that Hashiba would soon invade Satomi, but that inevitable event had meant Musashi’s destiny led them to a fierce battle over control of the Far East.

Once that happened, Musashi might lose its peace and begin to rush.

...And that's why.

That was why Yoshiyori told the idiot to smile no matter what.

And the idiot had done so. He had remained his usual self during and after the defeat that could be seen as Musashi's greatest crisis. And if Musashi's Vice President was right, no greater crisis awaited them afterwards.

During and after their greatest defeat, that idiot had maintained his smile just as Yoshiyori had told him to.

That meant it would always be doing what Yoshiyori had said.

"Dammit."

That's not fair, thought Yoshiyasu to no one in particular.

Because it was between two boys? Because it was between two who had been left in charge of a nation? While Yoshiyasu had only been able to cry and smolder, Yoshiyori and that idiot had sent out the best they had hoped for and it had been accepted.

Yoshiyasu understood nothing.

She placed a hand on Murasamemaru at her hip. The hilt did not move. She could not draw the blade. She understood nothing and that was why she could not draw it. It was only natural. And now Yoshiyori was gone, her sister was gone, and the people of Satomi had evacuated to Mito or other areas, so no one served under her. So...

"It lightens the load on me."

"You don't have to be so humble, Satomi President."

What did that mean?

If she had a lighter load on her shoulders, she just had to take on more and more of a load in the future. Murasamemaru and Yatsufusa would eventually decide whether that was for the best or not. For the time being, she just had to do what was needed of her.

Then, she thought. Now that a Satomi like me has become a resident of that

idiot's nation, what role can I play to ensure that idiot doesn't stop smiling?

There was only one definite answer at the moment.

"I'm looking forward to the meeting tonight."

"Yes, we will hold it over there. ...What do you think?"

Yoshiaki pointed toward the edge of the multi-layer city. Below some large eaves was a large wooden elevator that led to the snowy ground far below. A large circle had been carved into the ground there.

"That is the Great Bowl crossing the provisional border between Date and Mogami. It is approximately ten kilometers across and four kilometers deep. It produces a large quantity of Orei Metallo, and..."

And...

"It is said to have been the origin of Novgorod. This giant spot is quite the spectacle when the moon is out at night. How about we have a summer festival while watching it?"

Adele looked to the vast bowl-shaped hole that Yoshiaki indicated.

Adele was used to the Musashi, but...

"Ohhh..."

Even she saw it as a gigantic white depression. As for its shape...

...What cup size is that...?

It's the difference between the underbust and top measurements that matters, she thought, but...

"Huh? I thought Novgorod was created in the Harmonic Divine States?"

"It was. ...I said this was the 'origin', didn't I?" The fox laughed in her throat. "You know what happened in Oushuu before the creation of the Harmonic Divine States, don't you? And you know how the oldest people of Oushuu – that is, the pure long-lived – live now, don't you?"

Adele had indeed seen that and Yoshiyasu nodded next to her.

“The people of Hiraizumi have a city on the surface and also use aerial ships like a city. Are you saying there was a custom of taking land from here for floating cities?”

“Yes. The area between Mogami and Date was the site of intense fighting during the Age of Dawn and also where the northern rule was later established.”

Masazumi faced Yasuhira in a large space.

It was the large dining hall on one side of the school building. It had been cleared of people for the meeting, so it was a closed space with several tables lined up. As long as they placed directional defense spells on the windows and entrances...

“Heh heh. This is the perfect place for a break. Fine, then. I feel like some food, so I’ll go make us something.”

The Aoi Sister entered the kitchen while taking the spell cloth in her hair and rewrapping it to cover her hair like a bandanna. She must have known the cook because she held up her chef’s license sign frame and was pointed toward the ingredients.

Opening the dining hall would reduce the crowds at the food stands outside, but...

...Eating in the dining hall? Such luxury...

A large vegetable dish would be godlike! thought Masazumi as Asama sat next to her.

Vice President: “Satomi President, Balfette, can you see the place yet?”

Flat Vassal: “Eh? Oh, yes! This is Adele Balfette reporting from the scene!”

Righteousness: “Judge. I’ll use my sign frame’s additional divine protection to take photos and send them over. It’s what I use for recon with my god of war, so it’s low resolution but easily enhanced.”

Nine-Tail Fox: “Heh heh. Even if we’ve already given you permission, you have guts saying that in front of another nation’s ruler.”

Righteousness: “If I didn’t go at least this far with you, you’d make fun of me.”

Was it a good sign that Asama smiled a little at the Satomi President’s conversation?

When the image arrived, Masazumi enlarged it in the sign frame. Tsukinowa tilted its head a few times while increasing the precision of the zoomed in version and she showed it to Yasuhira.

“Is this giant hole the land your ancestors sent floating into the sky?”

“It is. ...The records say there was an Oushuu base there during the war. And after the war, the suppression army used that base and its ether equipment.”

Masazumi tilted her head at that. She found Yasuhira’s phrasing odd and asked about it.

“That’s a lot of hearsay for a long-lived like you.”

“Not even the long-lived are immortal. My information on the past comes from oral tradition, so it is based in hearsay,” explained Yasuhira. “But after the suppression, there is of course a gap in the records. ...It would seem the suppression army tried to hold onto Oushuu’s allegiance by preventing us from taking control of our own history.”

“In Shinto terms, that era would be the chaotic period before the world had settled on a common stance. It was the period leading to the many meetings in which the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project was developed.”

Instead of directly facing Yasuhira’s words, Asama simply spoke the truth. Masazumi felt relieved but also worried that this was putting a burden on the girl. But...

Marube-ya: “Asama-chi! Take her on! Making a scene here is sure to be lucrative!”

Asama: “Umm, so you’re saying I should fire an arrow your way?”

At least they have plenty of energy. At least they have that. Yes.

At any rate, Masazumi held her right palm out toward Yasuhira.

“The differences in viewpoint and interpretation are not important to me at the moment. ...But you’re saying this land rose from the earth after the Anti-Divine Pro-Tuning Project?”

“According to the records, yes. The Harmonic World’s Oushuu was a frigid land. ...The records say the base was returned, floating equipment was built, and that land was sent to assist those in the Harmonic World. ...Then again, one theory suggests the floating equipment and everything else was supplied by the suppression army to build an emergency fleet centered on an aerial mothership.”

Mal-Ga: “Sounds a lot like Hashiba’s One-Night Castle.”

Flat Vassal: “But, um...”

A puzzling pause filled the sign frame and the girl continued after about three breaths.

Flat Vassal: “Why did the Z+++ cup size developed by the people of Oushuu end up being Novgorod? This land is in Oushuu, but Novgorod is in the Kinki region which is a good ways west of here.”

Righteousness: “I know what the people of Oushuu were thinking. ...It was to prepare for the Genpei period, wasn’t it?”

“Exactly. I am impressed you know that, Satomi President,” confirmed Yasuhira. “As the Minamoto clan, the Taira family was our enemy. The Taira clan they developed from was created in the year 825. ...One hundred years before that, in the year 725, the Testament had already predicted (including footnotes) that the people remaining in Oushuu and Kantou would eventually fight a great war. To determine what sort of war it would be and whether it would be settled via interpretations, our ancestors had to decide whether or not they would return to Oushuu from their northern land.”

Yasuhira smiled a little. And...

“Now, what do you think they did?”

She asked her question and fell silent with a smile. So after three seconds, Masazumi responded.

“Eh?”

Asama: “Unexpected quiz time! It’s quiz time! Shinto and Buddhism really do love their riddles! I was the assistant host of the Shirasago run Shinto quiz show Pittashi God-God last year!”

Smoking Girl: “We watched that during our breaks in the engine division, but did you really have to recreate divine punishments for wrong answers just cause all the questions were about gods? Although I’ll admit it was fun seeing some rarer divine punishments like ‘swept down a river while carrying a heavy load’, ‘jumping splits’, ‘chopsticks up the ass’, or ‘salt in the wound’.”

Silver Wolf: “The Far East really does like that kind of thing... But the first show I got hooked on after coming here was the Far Eastern version of Quiz Hexagone.”

Vice President: “Okay, everyone. Are you sure you’re not all changing the subject to avoid admitting you don’t know the answer to Yasuhira’s question?”

Wise Sister: “Oh, come on. I didn’t say anything, silly girl.”

Vice President: “I didn’t mean *everyone* everyone!”

Oh, no, thought Masazumi as she looked to Yasuhira’s smile.

Me: “Seijun! This is the time for that ‘funny joke’ you have in mind!!”

Vice President: “What? That one’s sure to kill, so I’ve got to save it for a better time.”

Almost Everyone: “Give up on that dangerous idea and just use it!!”

I can’t do that! she thought, but there was no helping it.

The smile across from her remained unchanged, so she was definitely being tested here. Everything was fine as long as Yasuhira remained calm, but this would get dangerous once that was gone. After all...

...Then we won’t be able to get the cooperation of the other nations or advance toward stopping the Apocalypse, just like Ookubo said.

While wondering what to do, Masazumi tried asking a question as a form of diplomacy.

“You’re asking what your ancestors did in the Harmonic World’s Oushuu after learning of the Genpei War. ...What happens if we don’t know that?”

“You should have had time to look into that since last night.”

...I get the feeling she isn’t going to be very forgiving.

Next to her, Asama quickly hid Hanami behind herself and had the Mouse begin a search. *That’s kind of like cheating*, thought Masazumi, but Yasuhira breathed in.

“I see. We achieved a consensus last night, but it would seem the short-lived truly are realists if you still did not manage to step that far into our-...”

The woman just about finished with the word “past”, but...

“Hold on. It’s still our turn to answer, isn’t it?”

A voice reached them.

“You want to know what Oushuu’s long-lived did in the Harmonic World’s Siberia during the 8th and 9th centuries? That’s easy.”

A sudden voice echoed from the dining hall’s main entrance behind Masazumi.

When she looked back, she saw a boy in a summer uniform walking over. He pushed up his glasses before continuing.

“Novgorod’s predecessor was established around the year 854. It was conquered by savages, which actually led to gathering into a proper city in 862. ...And in the Far East, the Taira clan was created in 825.

“That leads to a single conclusion.

“Development of eastern Siberia was going well, but the west was a different story. So Oushuu’s long-lived sent a floating city to Russia in 825 as Novgorod and then returned to Oushuu with their aerial fleet. Then western Siberia modified the floating city they had received. In 862, it became Novgorod and supported the development of the land from there... How about that? Oushuu’s

long-lived pursued romance by returning to the Far East. With the coming Genpei War and dominion of the Far East on the line, they returned to the stage of intersecting light and darkness...”

Someone struck a pose next to Masazumi and then named himself.

“I am Musashi Ariadust Academy Secretary Toussaint Neshinbara. ...Lady Fujiwara Yasuhira, please give me your autograph. I have an autograph sheet prepared.”

Four Eyes: “Are you still mixing business with pleasure like that? Oh, but get one for me too. You need to pay me back for freeing you from that spell.”

Novice: “I didn’t ask you to do that, so I’m only paying half price. And I’m not going back home until you leave. Once you’ve given up on a number of things, could you pull the porn books out from under the bed for collection?”

Mal-Ga: What do you think you two are doing? This isn’t giving me what I need.”

Four Eyes: “Two doujinshi ago, I think you could have surprised people more when they turned the page if you had gone for more of a close-up shot on the top right panel of page 12.”

Mal-Ga: “The panel below it shifts to Asama’s ass, so I couldn’t focus so much on the face.”

Four Eyes: “So you put ivy in between to guide the reader’s eye and provide a bondage image? I get it now.”

Asama: “Um! Did I just see my name in there!? My name!? ...And Shakespeare-san, are you really leaving so soon!? What a shame!”

Four Eyes: “I don’t really like people who let their stubbornness show. ...But don’t worry. When I saw the bed earlier, I got a pretty bad nosebleed and bloodied up the blanket, so I’ll be taking it back with me. That’s fine, right?”

Almost Everyone: “Eek!”

Now then, thought Masazumi while looking toward Yasuhira with Neshinbara who had received the autographs.

She asked a question of Yasuhira who folded up her portable calligraphy set and stored it in her skirt.

“Let’s continue where we left off last night. ...The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies. Where are they? Or rather, do they exist?”

Masazumi saw Yasuhira smile at her question.

The long-lived woman asked a question while seated.

“What did Lady Yoshitsune say?”

“That she doesn’t know where they are.”

“She probably did.” Yasuhira smiled. “I do not know that either.”

Wise Sister: “And theeeeeere you have it! After putting so, so, so much effort into getting this meeting and after Asama answered those questions so seriously, she doesn’t even know. Asama, you can shoot her! Hit her with one that has a Yamata Takeru curse that turns her into a Shinto transvestite! C’mon!”

Silver Wolf: “Um, I seriously doubt such a bizarre spell really exists. Right, Tomo?”

Asama: “Eh? On, um... S-sorry.”

Silver Wolf: “...”

Gold Mar: “Is it just me or does Shinto have more bizarre stuff than the local Oushuu gods they erased?”

Mal-Ga: “That’s right. They triggered a war by forcing their bizarreness on those normal local religions.”

I doubt that, thought Masazumi as she asked a question.

“Lady Yasuhira, this just occurred to me, but what were the local religions here like?”

After a moment of thought, Yasuhira answered.

“Well, we had the Kubizuka burial mounds for severed heads, we had stone circles, we had nude clay figures, we had giant stone pillars, we had festivals that can only be described with the sound effect ‘Onbashira!’, we were always climbing the mountains, we loved deformities...”

Mal-Ga: “Are you sure they weren’t just heathens?”

Worshiper: Animism! It’s called animism! Life worship is a lot like animism, you know!?”

Uqui: “Ane-mism!?”^[2] You mean the worship of elder sisters!? Now that’s renaissance thinking!”

Pipe down, all of you. Even if I was the one to start this.

At any rate, Masazumi recalled what Yoshitsune had said and thought on it.

...She doesn’t know where the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies are, hm?

With that answer in mind, she realized something: she had asked the wrong question.

“Yasuhira, allow me to restate my question.”

Masazumi spoke her remade question.

“Did the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies actually exist?”

“You’re a sharp one,” said Yasuhira while leaning back.

She had been surprised how much Lady Yoshitsune had told them, but now she kind of understood. This member of the crossdressing politician genre had some sense.

...She questions things.

That was different from doubting things.

She did not allow herself to make internal assumptions about things.

Everything “was”, but she did not make assumptions as to “how” it was.

Everything had a “result”, but she did not make assumptions as to whether that result was “good or bad”.

She did not decide on the “how” or the “good or bad” inside herself.

So the night before, she had learned of Oushuu’s past and understood what it meant, but she had not shown any more surprise or guilt than was necessary.

She accepted that their past “was” and that it had a “result”, so she was not ignoring it. If she had been thinking about how that past should be or whether its result was good or bad, it would have been easier to ignore it or hide it just like Shinto did.

And yet...

...She casually asked about that history.

“———”

Yasuhira straightened up. Then she leaned forward to place Musashi’s Vice President in the center of her vision. She took a breath to reset her emotions.

I can’t believe this. I have grown quite soft, Lady Yoshitsune, she thought. And when she wondered if Lady Yoshitsune had revealed this information on a whim like she did so many things...

...Lady Yoshitsune, you never acted on a whim when it came to people.

“Hey.”

She heard a sudden voice and saw Musashi’s Vice President relax her shoulders across from her.

“The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies might provide a hint to stopping the Apocalypse, so can you tell us about them? ...What exactly are they?”

Yasuhira smiled bitterly in her heart at that question.

Yasuhira was evaluating Musashi’s Vice President in a number of ways, but the girl went after what she wanted regardless.

She was surprisingly greedy.

So Yasuhira began to speak while feeling she had no choice.

“Based on my research, that was the standard name of the initial academies built across the Far East after the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project began.”

Meaning...

“I believe there were a great many academies across the Far East that went by that name.”

...I see.

Masazumi felt a little disappointed. Yoshitsune had already told them that the initial academies were called that.

But...

...Huh?

That's weird, she thought.

She looked to Asama for confirmation and Asama nodded back. Also, Mitotsudaira sent a message and the Aoi Sister lifted up her breasts in the kitchen. *What is that supposed to mean!?* She ignored that last one.

“Um, Yasuhira. I would like to confirm something about the purpose of the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies...”

“Yes, they were prayer academies... Rain comes from the heavens, so they likely began in undeveloped lands as a place for technological development such as prayers for life-giving rain. Of course, these were ‘divinely ordained’ prayer academies...that likely means they were ordered built by a god and thus by the emperor.”

“Then can we ask something? Um, Asama?”

Masazumi looked back to Asama.

After a prompting nod, Asama breathed in, looked to Yasuhira, and asked a question.

“Then why does Shinto have no records of these academies? They were built by the emperor and developing technology such as rain prayers is Shinto territory. So...why?”

That's right, thought Masazumi as she nodded along with everyone else.

Yasuhira responded after a nod of her own.

“I do not know the details either. Because, for the most part, these academies no longer exist.”

“Why is that?”

Yasuhira answered with a wave of her hand. This produced a map of the Far East with several red dots drawn on top.

“Could you look at this for a moment?”

After Yasuhira used her fingertips to toss over the 30 cm map, Masazumi looked at it with the others. Asama quickly relayed the information to the others listening in through the divine network.

“The red dots on the ground are where I suspect a Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy was located.”

There were a lot of them. It was easily over fifty.

...But why didn't any survive if there were so many?

The answer came from an unexpected place.

Bell: “These are...”

It was Suzu. After a pause long enough to tilt her head, she continued.

Bell: “...the Harmonic Territories?”

Asama quickly connected her sign frame to Musashi's Asama Shrine network.

She summoned Hanami, opened the protection, and viewed the locations of the Harmonic Territories based on the Musashi's standard course.

“Clap!”

Thank you, she thought with a nod as she overlaid that data on Yasuhira's map. And...

...They match!

The red dots all coincided with a Harmonic Territory.

Of course, there were more Harmonic Territories in all and many of them lacked a red dot, but every last one of the dots was inside a Harmonic Territory.

Just as Asama wondered what this meant, she noticed a pattern to the red dots. None of them were bunched together and they were positioned at even intervals along three lines running across the islands of the Far East from the north end of Oushuu to the south end of Kyushu. Also...

“In Shinto terms, these are ley line branches and pools...”

A lot of the locations were said to have once contained a Shinto shrine. Those had been destroyed by the Harmonic Territories, but it still meant the red dots were located at important points on the ley lines. Which meant...

“The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies...were used to control the ley lines, weren’t they?”

And...

“They were the Gates that connected the current Divine States of this world with the Harmonic Divine States of the Harmonic World.”

Some of the red dots were located on the ocean and they too coincided with Harmonic Territories.

“Most likely, the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies were there to manage the Gates. That continued for a long time, but as the management role shifted to the rulers of the land and as time passed, the academies became shrines and castles instead. And...during the Harmonic Unification War, they were destroyed when the Harmonic World fell into this world, primarily around those Gates.”

Those Gates still remained.

“Most of them have dissolved into the ley lines and are the cause of certain mysterious disappearances or instances of *shukuchi*, but the most well-known one would be the Gate controlled by Tres España that connects southern Kyushu to eastern Ezo.”

“Yes, that is the best way to look at it. ...Those academies were only used in the earliest stages of history and became other things due to the Far East’s circumstances, the stability of the ley lines, and the changing times. And they were finally destroyed during the collapse of the Harmonic World. But...”

“But?”

After asking that, Asama realized something.

...Oh. I'm losing myself in solving this mystery with Yasuhira-san.

Yasuhira seemed to have come to the same realization. They exchanged a glance from across the table and finally...

“...”

The two of them smiled a little.

Mal-Ga: “What!? What is this silence!? My doujinshi senses are tingling!”

Shut up.

But Asama continued thinking without forcing the smile away.

...Even with everyone standing between us due to our positions, we still enjoy solving a mystery.

They were leaning toward each other as they exchanged information. Asama was glad she had noticed that and glad she had noticed that Yasuhira had noticed.

So she fixed her collar and let her guard down.

“But what, Yasuhira-san?”

“Well, the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies that managed the Gates were lost during the Harmonic Unification War, but there is a single spot where one might survive.”

And that was...

“Novgorod.”

Yoshiyasu viewed the giant bowl-shaped hole from the layered city's cliff. The bowl of white snow and blue shadow had had its edge worn down by long years of erosion, but...

“There was a Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy here?”

It was possible. The Oushuu base would likely have been located at a

gathering point of the ley lines. If the suppression army had arrived and set up what they claimed was a peaceful “academy”...

“The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy here would have been the oldest academy.”

The vassal nodded in agreement while eating a third wafer she had gotten from somewhere.

“It was here and it moved to the Harmonic World as a floating city, so I wonder if it escaped the destruction like England did.”

The vassal looked Yoshiyasu’s way from the terrace railing on the edge of the city.

“Oh, you can have this card. I stubbornly kept drawing new ones like it was my destiny to get a good one.”

“Akashi Takenori? That is not the reading I would have guessed for those kanji.”

How do they decide which ones are super rare? she wondered, but then Yoshiaki pointed at her own face while standing nearby.

“Yeah, your name is pretty hard to read too,” said Yoshiyasu. “Wait, are you saying they made one of you too?”

“I’m Rare 3. You’re Rare 1, though.”

“Who’s using my name without permission!?”

“That would be IZUMO,” said the vassal as she checked the bag. She then spoke to Yoshiaki. “Yoshiaki-san, did you know Novgorod was that Divinely Whatever Academy?”

“Of course not. Hiraizumi’s Yasuhira is the child of those who returned before the Genpei War, you know? And...the people of Oushuu would like to erase all traces of those who once suppressed our land.”

“Does that mean that Divinely Whatever Prayer Academy doesn’t exist at Novgorod anymore?”

“I have no way of knowing that. But Novgorod is still floating, which means

the ether engine system inside it is still running. ...Also, well, you'll be able to see something interesting later."

"Later?"

Yoshiyasu did not know what Yoshiaki was talking about. That woman was a fox and she apparently had no intention of answering here. She simply smiled a little and gave a non-answer.

"Just look forward to it. We'll be holding a festival, after all."

Yoshiaki moved back with a step that hung in the air briefly.

"Originally, the festival was meant to see Komahime off."

"See her off?"

"That's right. ...According to the Testament descriptions, Komahime weds Hashiba Hidetsugu and then commits suicide along with Hidetsugu after he angers Hashiba. So do you understand what we were trying to do?"

Yoshiyasu did. Of course she did. This was Oushuu, where the Testament Union's wishes did not apply. It was a land of resistance. If someone here had been told to die in accordance with the Testament...

"You were trying to use interpretations to escape and break through that death, weren't you?"

"That's right... By having her 'commit suicide' in advance and then leave Mogami, she could have lived however she wanted. And with her beloved who faced a similar destiny."

"Eh?" responded the vassal. Her eyebrows rose. "With her beloved? You mean like getting married?"

Yoshiaki closed her eyes and placed a smile on her lips before speaking.

"Do you know who it was that faced a similar destiny?"

"...Date Kojirou?"

After a pause, Yoshiaki finally nodded. There was no surprise there. She simply stated the answer as if it were obvious.

"You saw the footage during today's attack, didn't you? ...Kojirou and

Komahime are both under Hashiba's control now."

And...

"It is all in accordance with the promise we all made long ago."

The shadowy place was of course full of shadows, but there was a blue light in the center.

The entire horizontal space gave a view of the sky in every direction. It was the large viewing deck on the rear of the Jurakudai.

The beds used to preserve Komahime and Hidetsugu's ghostly bodies were located there. As usual, the girl was standing and the boy was sleeping. And...

"His sleep has grown a lot deeper since last night."

That worried comment came from Niwa, #2 of P.A. Oda's Five Great Peaks. She raised her eyebrows a little as she looked to the pulsating blue light and Komahime spoke to her with a weak expression.

"Is Koji-..."

She trailed off and restated her question.

"Is Hidetsugu-sama okay? He hasn't moved at all since last night..."

"All I can say is that I don't know. I was put in charge of Kantou for a different purpose."

She looked to the gigantic long form visible in the southern sky.

"I'm supposed to use the Azuchi Castle to provide supplies. ...That is, I load supplies in Kantou so they can be sent to Shibata's forces as they invade Sviet Rus and Hashiba's forces as they attack Mouri. ...But this is outside the scope of my skills."

Niwa looked back to the ether light rippling out from above the sleeping boy.

That was the ether "gate" that acted as an exit for the Seiryu. The light had a pulse at the moment, but it was smaller and weaker than the day before.

"The Seiryu must have been worn down a lot by last night's exchange. To

make a rapid recovery, it is consuming Lord Hidetsugu's Internal Blessings. The Mouse is making use of its master."

"Is there any way to stop it?"

"By defeating the Seiryu. ...But that would be dangerous."

After all...

"According to the spies in Date, a Seiryu with a physical body has appeared there. Meanwhile, the Seiryu here is more like a ghost. I'm guessing it's taking the form that most suits Lord Hidetsugu and Lady Masamune's 'state of being', but as a ghost, Lord Hidetsugu has a greater connection to the Seiryu. So if the Seiryu were destroyed..."

"It would affect Hidetsugu-sama?"

Niwa nodded.

"Instead of 'vanishing', it would take damage and 'be erased'. If you forcibly remove a ghost possessing someone or a Mouse that has grown too attached to its owner, it will harm that host or master in a similar way. So if possible, I would want to defeat the Seiryu in Date. Theirs is physical, so its defeat should have a minimal effect on Lady Masamune. If that happened..."

She looked to the ripples overhead.

"This Seiryu has a weaker presence, so it would either vanish or remain as only insignificant traces."

"But can Date defeat their Seiryu?"

"It doesn't look good. During last night's battle, their 2nd Special Duty Officer Oniniwa, a god of war pilot, was badly injured. Of course, he also did some decent damage to the Seiryu. But..."

The ripples were weak and powerless.

"This Seiryu is going there...no, I should probably say it's being called there. This Seiryu is a collection of ether, so it's being called to Date to repair the damage to the physical one there. Which means..."

Niwa raised both index fingers and brought them together.

“Just like this, our ether Seiryu is joining together with the damaged Date Seiryu. So next time the ‘gate’ appears behind Lady Masamune, it’s probably a combined Seiryu that will come out.”

“You mean...?” Komahime tilted her head. “Date will defeat the combined Seiryu and make it Masamune-sama’s?”

“Probably. I think Date Vice President Katakura has done a good job setting this up. I’m betting he had a general idea how the Seiryu’s manifestation process worked and brought Lady Masamune along on yesterday’s shelling of the Ariake to test it out. ...So now he’s confirmed that the Seiryu is split between an ether version and a physical version. And the effect on Lady Masamune was probably all part of his plan to not let her know what is going on. But...”

She placed a hand on the bed where Hidetsugu slept.

Immediately, bluish-white light rose like sparks from below her hand.

“Niwa-sama!”

Komahime was hit by the after effects of the sparks and she covered her raised ears with her hands, but Niwa crushed the leaping light in her hand.

“The Seiryu is furious. Not angry or sad...enraged. Date’s fighting force is limited to their Vice Chancellor at the moment, so how do they hope to defeat the enraged Seiryu?”

But then Niwa held up her fist as ether light spilled from it. She stared at and through the light that poured down like water or sand.

“The Seiryu does not know why it is here or what it should do. It only knows it has strength and it likely thinks it will die if it does not use that strength. ...That is truly what a dragon is. The Seiryu is a weapon designed to wield its strength in a rampage. It likely thinks that is its proper identity as a dragon, but it must also wonder why no one will accept it when that is the only way it can live. It must wonder why everyone tries to stop it.”

Niwa looked to Hidetsugu.

“Just like those afflicted with the unwanted destiny of their inherited name.”

“————”

Niwa did not respond to Komahime's silence. She simply opened an *insha koto* and checked the time. It was currently 4:32 PM. She gave Komahime a quick bow.

“I heard a stealth fleet left the Ariake. Most likely, their discussion concerning cooperation from Oushuu and Hiraizumi is complete.”

“You mean Musashi is gradually bringing the Oushuu forces to their side?”

“The three nations will begin their party with the ambassadors at five and begin the meeting at seven. Depending on the result, the Jurakudai and the Azuchi Castle may have to take action to oppose them and provide a warning.”

“I am prepared for that.”

When Komahime tensed up and nodded, Niwa smiled.

“Lady Komahime, please do not force yourself to think too much about your mother. If this does lead to battle, it should occur after moving far from here.”

“...Moving?”

“Shaja.” Niwa nodded. “They will be taking a short trip from the Ariake to Novgorod.”

“From the Ariake to Novgorod? What kind of unit of travel is that?”

“So you can't stop the snarky comments either, Anayama?”

They were on the central road below the long stairway in front of Ariadust Academy.

The three nations meeting to be held after the special student general assembly was to be a secret meeting, but it would apparently actually be held on the bridge up above. For that reason, the road below was being used to celebrate the Vice President's results.

“But are you really pleased with how that attack turned out?”

Isa heard a voice say “testament”.

“It went very well indeed, Isa-kun. With the special student general assembly over, the Vice President and Representative Council Head are sure to reconcile their differences and share their information. The information from Yagyu and the Public Morals Committee Head would have exposed our attacks, so there was no point in hiding our presence any longer.” Anayama smiled bitterly.

“Therefore. Musashi’s guard unit and committees will be searching for the dolls you’ve made. Musashi should also send a protest to our school, but...well, they’ll probably just insist they had no idea. Meanwhile, Musashi will have to use their security forces to their fullest, but...”

“We’ve shown that Sanada is trying to assassinate a VIP, but we failed at pulling it off.”

“But,” repeated Anayama as his presence viewed the surrounding food stands that were preparing to close shop. “Let’s enjoy this atmosphere a while longer and then get moving. I’ll tell Yuri-kun and Nezu-kun to do the same. I’ll tell them we’re going to take action when the time comes.”

Chapter 69: Preparers on the Dance Stage

第六十九章

『舞踏会場の準備者達』



始まりの
更に予兆となる
静かなステップの先取りとは
配点（手を取って）

What is the calm leading step

That predicts what comes

Beyond the beginning?

Point Allocation (Take My Hand)

Masazumi and Asama stood atop the evening bridge.

They were at the top of the stairs leading down toward the ship's bow. Looking down from there, they saw people and the lights of food stands gathered in the plazas and streets, just like during the special student general assembly.

The people had begun to flow into the academy's schoolyards as well.

But the bridge was off limits.

"We need to prepare for the meeting..."

The three nations meeting would begin in another hour. Some of them would already be participating in the pre-meeting parties.

The meeting itself had begun with those parties. Just like in England, a gathering before the traditional "politics" began was not just an event to enjoy dancing and food. Each of the important players would work to include or exclude their areas of responsibility from the upcoming topic of discussion. Normally, they would hint at their priorities during conversation and "lay the groundwork" as it were, but...

...No one out there now is a specialized diplomat or committee member, so things will play out differently.

Instead of making any decisions on the groundwork laid by the other nations, everyone would send that information back to Masazumi's father and the rest of the Provisional Council. The Provisional Council had dealt with diplomacy in the past, so they knew these other nations quite well. They could make their own decision and consult with the committees before sending an answer back to the diplomats.

Mukai was doing an especially good job. She looked like a child, so a kind person would be considerate and those who underestimated her would try to bluff. When the Provisional Council sent back a response for her, the gap between the two was apparently pretty awful, so Mukai's reports were growing more and more valuable.

...Who would have thought how Mukai is accepted would coincide with my father and the others' job?

He was a strict father, so he was probably making a rational decision for the greatest effect based on an understanding of Mukai and who she was speaking with.

"Whaaaat!? What the hell did you just say!? Didn't I tell you I would be handling all of Mu-chan's responses!? Meet with the committees!? Why would I do that!? I will be handling it all myself! And Industrial Committee Head! Only a select group may call her Suzu-san! Even calling her Mukai-san is too much! You are limited to two letters! Call her Mu-sama! ...Ah! Mu-chan just sent me a thank you divine mail! And it is truly divine because it contains a comment from Masazumi as well! If you want to see it, you'd better start offering up some money and privileges!"

"Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! What about A-chan's responses!?"

"You do them, Koni-tan... Think of it as a reward for your tribute last night..."

"Um! Honda-san! What about the divine mail here from the ninja?"

"Who caaaaaaaaaaaaaaaares? He's a guuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuy!"

"Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! I admire how quickly you can switch it on and off!"

My father and the others must be busy, thought Masazumi as she continued her divine mail exchange. *I need to pull it together myself.* But it was her job to decide what to do next based on those matters.

Vice President: "Diplomats, do you have any questions about the upcoming three nations meeting?"

Righteousness: “What kind of discussion do you think it will end up being?”

It was a vague question, but she could already see its intention. So...

Vice President: “What is our goal? Keep that in mind and look at this again.”

Me: “Was it war?”

Hori-ko: “Yes. It was a great war of aggression so we can conquer the world and retrieve my emotions.”

Vice President: “Hold it, you two.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. But that special student general assembly ultimately had a war ending, didn’t it? You fanned the flames! You just fanned them and fanned them! And our odds of victory are up again! All the other nations should tremble in fear of our Vice President!”

Marube-ya: “Judge. She even said we’re leaving port.”

Bell: “D-don’t worry. I-I-I’m ready for...that...”

Vice President: “Wait, wait, wait, all of you. That isn’t what I was trying to say! I’m trying to take this seriously!”

Azuma: “So you’re saying it’s time to take going to war seriously?”

Gold Mar: “It’s pretty impressive we made it this far if we were only treating war like a game.”

Scarred: “Um, everyone, it was Lady Masazumi’s predilection for war that solved our incident, so what happens to Master Tenzou and me if you reject that...?”

Mal-Ga: “I would love it if the end of this line↑ was said with her hands on her blushing cheeks.”

10ZO: “You’re watching! You’re watching us, aren’t you!? But from where!?”

Flat Vassal: “Our couples have been really open about things lately. Is it the impatience brought by war?”

Silver Wolf: “What are all of you talking about!? The meeting is going to start soon!”

Mitotsudaira paused long enough to take a breath.

Silver Wolf: “Listen, everyone. We have no time. Things are already on the move! We need to focus. Okay, Masazumi. I agree we need to take this seriously, so how are you going to bring this to war?”

Almost Everyone: You’re the worst one of us all!!”

Vice President: “Dammit... You all must see me as a politician that uses jokes to lure people into a false sense of security before declaring war.”

Asama: “There’s...there’s something off about that view of us! Are you okay, Masazumi!?”

They were all cruel, but a sudden thought came to mind.

...Are we gradually returning to the normal state of things?

She felt like the special student general assembly acted as a dividing line.

She had no intention of tooting her own horn, but...

Vice President: “I haven’t felt this mood in a while.”

They could see what they had to do and they had some leeway in doing it, so things were back to normal. She did not like being the butt of the jokes, but their aim would eventually drift to Crossunite or Asama. *Yes, that’s right. It has to. I’ll make sure it does.* But...

Hori-ko: “Yes. It has been a while...since we had a good war.”

Vice President: “Not what I meant!!”

After saying that and looking at the quizzical tilt of Tsukinowa’s head, Masazumi said more.

Vice President: This is diplomacy. ...If we can suggest what I’m currently thinking about, I think we can get the three nations on our side. And it should influence the other nations afterwards. That is the way I’m looking at it now.”

Righteousness: “In other words, leave it to you?”

Vice President: “No, not really. ...You’re the ones who will handle the local negotiations. I will provide you with a goal, a policy, and an approach to use, but it’s you who will clinch it.”

Listen.

Vice President: “Do whatever it takes, diplomats. Just make sure to fulfill your goals in a way that does not harm Musashi or Matsudaira. Diplomacy here will determine the future of not just Musashi but the Far East as a whole. We’re going to win here and then go defeat Hashiba.”

Mal-Ga: “You mean...diplomacy here is a form of war?”

Masazumi just about said “judge” before realizing that agreeing meant that this would lead to war.

...I just about fell for it!

She hurriedly tried to find something else to say, but could not come up with anything. So...

Vice President: “No, u-um, that’s not it. That’s definitely not it. Yes. Ha ha ha. That sure isn’t it.”

Almost Everyone: “Don’t force yourself!!”

She wondered what that meant, but she guessed it meant they had understood her.

Vice President: “I’ll have a plan put together by the time the meeting starts. I’ll probably discuss our policies with you in the meantime, but have a good time on the scene.”

She expected them to ask “A plan for war?”, but...

Me: “Judge. We left that with you, so leave this with us.”

Her words caught in her throat when he accepted it so readily, so she finally managed a single word.

“...Judge.”

She simply agreed for the time being.

Then the Tachibana Couple approached from the road below. They both held their weapons.

“Tachibana Muneshige and Gin reporting for tonight’s bodyguard duty after the special student general assembly.”

The Tachibana Wife stopped at the bottom of the stairs and bowed to see her husband off.

“The party should be starting soon.”

Suzu danced.

She did not know much about dancing, so she had asked Kimi about it:

Wise Sister: “It depends on the music, but when dancing with someone, you should be fine following your partner’s lead. If you mess up, it just means your partner did a bad job. Asama is pretty incredible as far as that is concerned. ... She finds so many chances to step on your feet or crush you. I can’t carelessly sing a duet with her in our band, so I have her sing with Mitotsudaira.”

Asama: “This idiot is talking on a more intuitive level, so I’ll send you a beginner’s step assistance spell from an entertainer god, okay?”

The Noise Neighbor she wore like headphones would tell her in advance what step was coming. It used a recorded adult’s voice.

“Okay♪ Move your left foot forward and then spin to the left-...no, the right-... oh, wait, it’s the left. Le-le-le-left-left? No, it was right! Okay! Okay! And next is the right-...left! Just a bit further now.”

She had figured out she generally needed to do the opposite of what it said.

She had her left arm forward and her right arm around her partner’s left arm. It was a gentle dance that took into account the two swords on her partner’s left hip.

“Masamune...-san?”

“What is it, Mukai-dono?”

It was a feeble voice with just enough of a waver to know she had to work to maintain it. Of course, that was something only those close to her or those with hearing on Suzu’s level would notice. To others...

...She should...sound the same as always.

The night before when Narumi and Yoshihime had told her about Masamune,

they had said she would be near Masamune before the meeting began and that they wanted her to support Masamune.

The various clans in Date territory were far from fully settled in and this meeting would likely determine the future of Oushuu, so they did not want to show any weakness. It was weird for them to ask Suzu for help, but she did want to speak with Masamune before the meeting.

But a tremor had run through her body when Masamune had greeted her.

“Nice to meet you, Musashi Ambassador,” Masamune had said. “My brother Kojirou seems to be somewhere else at the moment, but I’ll introduce you once he shows up.”

This was their third time meeting, but it was their first official meeting in a public space. And the death of Masamune’s brother Kojirou was being kept hidden.

In that sense, nothing she said was a lie. But...

...She sounds like she really thinks that.

Yoshihime had said that Masamune’s memories were consumed each time the Seiryu appeared.

Suzu did not know if meeting her and the death of Kojirou had been erased from Masamune or sealed away inside her.

But Urquiaga spoke quietly.

“A barrier to the elder sister character? ...I am left with no choice. I have already laid the groundwork, so it is time I got serious.”

Suzu did not know what he meant, but she felt provoking him would be a bad idea and simply acknowledged it.

However, her words and will seemed to get through to Masamune, so she spoke. She simply talked.

“Um...”

She was not a good speaker.

She felt like people who could see must be able to see the meaning and form

of her words between the time they left her mouth and the time they reached the listener. Asama and Neshinbara had smiled and said she was mistaken, but she felt like their words had a way of encouraging her or bringing a visual scene to mind even when they were simply reading a textbook.

...Neshinbara-kun can be confusing sometimes. He always ends up saying "heh" or screaming or making weird gestures or staring off into space...

But in general, her point was valid. So...

"A lot...happened."

"Yes, I have heard it began with Mikawa."

"Right," agreed Suzu.

She talked about Mikawa: How he had decided he would confess, how everyone had been hopeful or worried, how they had gone through a test of courage at the academy, how Asama had fired an arrow...

"Oh, how brave of her."

Masamune seemed to enjoy that part a lot. Suzu felt bad for Asama, though. But as she talked about it and remembered it all, she realized she may have been the first to notice something was wrong in Mikawa when she had noticed the guard station explosion.

That was almost three months ago at this point.

And occasionally she would get so lost in the story that Masamune would stop walking to follow the conversation.

She knew the girl was resting and that she did not want Suzu to notice. She also noticed Katakura, Narumi, and the others breathing sighs of relief behind them. So she decided to keep talking.

"Um..."

She felt something like anxiety. It was about Masamune but also about the guess at Date's policy that Masazumi had sent over just before the dance.

...The Date clan most likely wants to advance diplomatic relations without Masamune.

Suzu had a thought.

...Will that mean deceiving Masamune-san?"

Masamune was more or less under the Seiryu's control. If she did hold diplomatic relations like that, it could easily lead to issues with her political decisions and they would have to be more mindful of the other clans in their territory. If that increased the odds of a good deal for Musashi, Date would likely find it safer to leave Masamune out of the diplomatic relations. That was Masazumi's conclusion.

Suzu did not know what, but Masazumi could apparently see a great many things.

Which left only one thing for Suzu to do.

...Right. I need to do my best in every way I can.

After giving herself some silent encouragement, something occurred to her.

Did the current Masamune have any enjoyable experiences or memories to share?

Suzu felt it would be a shame if there had been things like that in the memories she no longer had.

...What does Urquiaga-kun think?

He had mentioned an elder sister character, so was he worried about Masamune?

But Urquiaga was speaking with Narumi.

"You fool! That is not what I meant! Why do you want to touch my leg so badly!?"

"What are you talking about? You're the one that stepped right into my path."

They were spinning and weaving through the hall in what was clearly "high speed movement".

...Yes.

The two of them seemed to get along quite well.

Narumi was definitely engaged in a battle.

She was glad she had chosen a red dress that gave her the leeway to move if need be. She would not have been able to move like this in the tight skirts the others were wearing.

She was engaged in a fight in which they tried to take each other's hand and place their feet in each other's spot.

To win, she was using quick footwork and striking with both arms while summoning new false arms each time.

Her opponent was striking with the edge of his forearms and his knees.

She generally deflected his blows outwards from within and he generally struck inwards from without. She had the superior movements, but he had the superior speed.

She attempted to take his hand.

This was a dance, after all. By taking his hand and pulling him in, she could seize the initiative.

As the representative of Date's warriors, she could not afford to lose to Musashi's 2nd Special Duty Officer. But...

...What a pain...

When she thought about it, she realized that victory in this dance meant to embrace the half-dragon in front of her. How was she even supposed to embrace something so large?

It was physically impossible.

...But.

They gently spun around, made a strike, swept each other's blows away, and kept up their footwork. When one placed their hand on the other's wrist, the other would make a snap reversal to grab at them instead. They would grab up to the elbow and use their other hand to keep their opponent's movements in

check.

They would sometimes sway their bodies, their hands would cross paths, they would attempt to grab their opponent's fingers while blocking their vision, and they would be forcibly deflected.

That's right, thought Narumi within the wind created by their actions. *Doesn't this half-dragon hope to be an inquisitor? In that case, he should be skilled in this sort of technique to take people's hands and secure them.*

One was a Vice Chancellor skilled in combat and the other was a 2nd Special Duty Officer skilled in capture. In situations that called for their specialized skills, how much of a difference would arise between them? While Narumi thought about that, they exchanged blows and traded positions in a slow push and pull.

“...”

Narumi had a sudden thought. As the two of them attempted to take each other's hand, she suddenly realized the two of them might be able to stop the Seiryu if they worked together.

“———”

She lowered her gaze to his feet which slowly pursued hers and then pulled back. As she watched that, a clear thought came to her: *If only I had a fighter like this on my side.*

He was about the same size as her in Unturning Centipede and he had the same level of mobility. There was no room for complaint in his strength and toughness. He had a definite eye for strategy and he could understand and fulfill his role while working with her.

He was the ideal partner. But...

...I would blatantly be using him, wouldn't I?

Their relationship would exist solely to defeat the Seiryu. And Date did not want to be indebted to Musashi. They were indebted enough already after the night before. That had been fine because it had left no records, but if they made definite plans to seal the Seiryu, she would have to separate his presence from

Musashi's authorization.

She had considered hiring him as a mercenary, but at the 2nd Special Duty Officer level, he could not make an individual contract. The two nations would need to approve it.

That left only one option.

...Have him join Date...

But how?

No, the method was simple. He only had to transfer schools and change his nationality.

But what would draw him to Date?

"...?"

Narumi suddenly thought of Masamune.

Masamune was an elder sister character.

But she was off limits. Truly off limits. Masamune had to lead Date in the future. She had to stay focused on that. After all, Narumi had to leave Date.

...Eh?

Another option occurred to Narumi: *What about me?*

Suzu sensed a sudden movement.

Masamune also seemed to notice while dancing with Suzu. The two of them looked to the center of the hall. A high-speed battle was still underway there, but...

"Ah..."

The movements of the two combatants' legs and bodies had changed.

Instead of using all their strength and speed to move front and back or left and right, some slower and more hesitant movements had appeared between Urquiaga and Narumi. And they seemed to be coming more from Narumi than Urquiaga.

...Is she conflicted?

But the way she was moving was reminiscent of something.

“She seems to be dancing.”

Masamune sounded relieved as she said that.

Narumi thought while intercepting and attacking.

Could she sacrifice herself to save Date?

This half-dragon was hopeless, but he was an excellent fighter and would make the perfect partner in a battle against the Seiryu. Her judgment as Vice Chancellor told her that.

But she could only describe his personality as “unfortunate”.

The first time they had met was on top of the Ariake. He had immediately asked if she was an elder sister and started to leave when she said no.

The second time they had met was aboard Aerial Ship Kawai Castle. He had simply watched as the wind blew her skirt around and then he had groped her breast.

The third time they had met was the night before. It had been an emergency, but he had handed her panties.

...Huh?

Narumi realized he had never actually done anything that harmed Date.

That was right.

On their first meeting, he had expressed his understanding of Date’s difficult position before leaving. On their second meeting, he had only groped her breast on accident and he had saved her life when the Seiryu attacked.

On their third meeting, he had arrived with the intention to help her defeat the Seiryu.

He had been helping them all along.

From the very beginning to now, he had at least tried to understand them and

to not harm them. And he had even helped them.

And so far, Musashi had not demanded anything in exchange for what he had done. His help had been on an individual level and had not been on orders from anyone.

In that case, wondered Narumi. Why?

Why had she seen her relationship with the half-dragon in such a hostile light?

...Because I am the Vice Chancellor.

She had to protect Masamune and she had to maintain her pride as the representative of Date's warriors.

So she had misread someone like him.

If she had made a direct attack on the Seiryu the day before, she would not have survived.

The night before had been little different. Even if they had resolved the problem, Sendai Castle would have been badly damaged.

But if she bowed down to him now and asked for assistance, would he help?

He likely would.

So why was she doing this? Why was she being so hostile to someone who would help them?

"You're mine!"

Narumi trembled at the sudden voice.

Lowering her head had been a mistake. Instead of stepping forward, the half-dragon reached his forearm around her body from the side.

Suzu sensed Urquiaga making a major move.

She thought that his arm had grabbed, forcibly lifted, and embraced Narumi's conflicted body and soul. But...

"Eh?"

Her lifted body was lowered once more.

After capturing Narumi, Urquiaga set her back down so she stood upright and then he bowed down on one knee.

“I failed to match the serene tempo of your dance, Date Vice Chancellor. I apologize for interfering with your movements.”

Restraining her racing pulse was the most Narumi could do.

The sudden embrace reminded her of the day before. He had grabbed her from the side and saved her life then.

And he had done it again now.

She realized her movements had to have grown disturbed and indecisive.

That was due to her confliction, but anyone watching would think she had simply fallen behind in their exchange of attacks. It had become something of a dance, but the half-dragon would have won.

That was why he had brought a premature end to the contest himself.

As he stood up and breathed a sigh in front of her, she asked a question.

“...Why?”

She felt it was unfair of her to ask so quietly, but her heart pounded in her chest as she waited for the answer.

Not even she knew what she wanted him to say, but there was one thing she did know.

This half-dragon was an idiot, but...

...He always tries to understand and help those in distress.

She did not know if that was due to his religion or if it was just a part of his personality. But because of that...

“Why did you save me?”

“To complete the elder sister character route...or so I would like to say.”

She was slightly out of breath as his gaze moved from her neck to her feet.

“It seems you chose something you wanted to wear this time. In that case, it would be wrong to not let you dance and show it off to Masamune and everyone else here.”

“Where-...?”

She tried and failed to ask where that had come from so suddenly, but he turned his back and walked to the break area by the wall as he said one last thing.

“It suits you much better than what you wore yesterday. I like it, Date Narumi.”

“So Itachi is having a party and Saijou is having a festival, huh?”^[3]

When the crossdresser made his comment, the automaton princess lowered her shoulders while walking down the hall next to him.

“...Sigh.”

“Th-this girl has learned how to sigh while looking down on me!”

“Calm down,” said Tenzou as he walked without leaving footprints on the red carpet. “We are about to have a meeting with Sviet Rus Chancellor and Student Council President Uesugi ‘the Terrible’ Kagekatsu-dono, so listen up. ...Toori-dono, this is Sviet Rus’s Student Council site. It says Kagekatsu-dono looks after the botanical garden and animals, but I believe that is to soften his image as ‘the Terrible’.”

Everyone looked at the screen where a tall demon silhouette was backlit by lightning. There were rabbits at his feet, but...

“Doesn’t this just make it look like a reign of terror?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“The shadow over his face does give that impression...” agreed Tenzou.

Shigenaga spoke to them from a half step away.

“You people have quite a gap between your serious and casual moments. ... And I thought you did a decent job greeting our committee heads earlier. Well, all of you but the crossdresser.”

“Hey, Hanchou^[4], my crossdressing is the real deal! I tricked your negotiators, didn’t I!?”

“And that’s why our people are feeling so depressed, which I feel like gave you an advantage!!”

Shigenaga bared her teeth and glared at him, so Tenzou held out a hand to calm her. He then raised his right index finger and spoke.

“Well, we will have him change before we move from the negotiation site, so he will be dressed as a boy. Don’t worry. In a way, I doubt anything weirder could happen.”

“I hope you’re right...” She looked back at them over her shoulder. “Anyway, don’t get careless. Sviet Rus Chancellor Uesugi Kagekatsu is a high-level demon. To use someone you know, he is comparable to the Reine des Garous.”

“Wouldn’t he be far more powerful as far as spells are concerned?” asked Mitotsudaira.

Shigenaga smiled bitterly.

“I am talking about another nation. If she is stronger in pure strength, let me put it another way. They are both nonhumans, but one is one of the werewolves who have strengthened and established their existence using mankind’s fear and the other is one of the demons who have reached their current form after branching off from the gods. Their strong points are different.”

Shigenaga then turned her back on them.

She reached her hand out toward the large door with red decorations that stood in their way and she spoke to the heavily-equipped guard protecting the door.

“I have brought the visitors from Musashi. ...Open the way.”

“Testament.”

The door opened and Shigenaga stepped into the dim light beyond. The Musashi representatives followed.

“———”

They walked straight in.

Chapter 70: Wise One in a Closed Place

第七十章

『閉じ場の賢者』

俯く心
避ける声無き苦鳴
立ち上がるのがやっどの威勢
配点《自意識》



A hanging heart

A voiceless cry of avoidance

Standing back up is the most this strength can manage

Point Allocation (Self-Consciousness)

Something seemed off to Tenzou as soon as he stepped inside.

...Mh?

Thanks to his skill as a ninja, he did not even need to enter a room. The heat, vibrations, and air current coming from a door told him the situation inside and whether or not there were people inside. The door was open in this case, so he could immediately grasp the situation within. But...

"...?"

He could see a dimly lit space beyond the door, but that was all. There was no heat or vibrations coming from the air inside. It was like walking through a wall.

Is this, he wondered, the Avalon that Masazumi-dono mentioned?

He realized Mary was moving closer to his side. She would have seen this setup before. This was a public space, so she did not hold his hand or link arms with him, but approaching him must have been her way of reassuring him as someone who knew what this was.

So he took her hand. Not to hold it but to pull her forward.

"Shall I escort you?"

When he asked, Mary gave a brief look of surprise but then smiled.

"Please do."

After that, Tenzou did not hesitate to head in. He endured the feeling of running into a wall and stepped inside.

After a sensation much like passing through a curtain, the view grew brighter.

...Oh.

He found himself in a large stone hall.

And he immediately heard the heavy sound of a pipe organ. It came from directly ahead, behind, and above.

“...!!”

Mitotsudaira felt sound wash over her.

But even as loud as it was, it was not mere noise. As proof, small bits of ether light began dancing around Mary.

Those were spirits.

Drawn out by the music, spirits of sound and air were growing active. They seemed to think a spirit-user like Mary would look after them. And when she simply smiled, the joyous ether light grew brighter.

It was the same around Mitotsudaira.

Werewolves were much like spirits or gods. They were also close to being an incarnation of human fear. That may have been why the spirit ether light floated gently while keeping its distance from her or trying to obey her.

She realized they surrounded her king as well. In his case, they were reacting to his ether supply spell and forming several lines that floated in the air around him.

Horizon stood on his other side and her gaze met Mitotsudaira's as they both looked at his back. Horizon must have been bothered by the ether lines because she tried to sweep them away with a hand, but they would not go away.

No one could tell where those lines led. Only her king could decide that.

That's right, thought Mitotsudaira. We left Mikawa, fought our battles, and endured a defeat, but now my king has come to a new place.

“————”

Mitotsudaira took a step forward. Standing out front was a knight's duty.

...Yes. We cannot hesitate to visit those who are watching us.

The committee representatives they had negotiated with and some automaton stood along the left and right walls.

And someone sat in a golden throne located atop a red carpeted dais up ahead.

...*That's Uesugi Kagekatsu.*

He was a slender 180cm. He had left and right horns, bluish-white skin, yellow eyes, and white hair.

He was the demon Chancellor who ruled this frigid land.

But Mitotsudaira did not fear him. She did not flinch within the sound washing over her. She was the Reine des Garous's daughter, the ruler of a Far Eastern territory, and a servant of the boy who was to be the Far East's king.

"As the Knight of Musashi Ariadust Academy's Chancellor and Student Council President and as the 5th Special Duty Officer, I shall greet you first."

After confirming that those behind her had come to a stop, she placed a hand on her chest and got down on one knee.

Her bow was answered with silence. The pipe organ had stopped playing.

Then Kagekatsu moved. He looked to the automaton standing next to him and to Shigenaga who stood diagonally in front of Mitotsudaira. Then he nodded.

"Testament. Very well."

It was a deep voice that seemed born of the air itself. Then a flood of Russian Orthodox icon-style *sankt okno* appeared around him.

Awash with the light of the *sankt okno*, he grabbed his iron staff with his right hand, lightly tapped his own shoulder, and spoke.

"At ease, Musashi representatives. Sviet Rus Chancellor Uesugi Kagekatsu shall speak with you directly..."

"Oh? Oh? So the meeting has begun in Sviet Rus, has it?" asked Yoshiaki. "Since Date is cleaning up their party hall, we should probably get started soon too."

Adele stood below the two moons with Yoshiaki, Yoshiyasu, and...

“Shakenobe here, mon! If you would like something to eat, I will take your order, mon!”

“Umm, I’ll have the white round rice bread slices, the caesar salad, the pork shoulder, and...oh, this mayon sauce is mayonnaise, right? If you can make it Far Eastern style, that would be great. Oh, and a chicken stew too.”

“That’s too much to remember, mon!”

Adele had no choice but to write her order on a sign frame and hand it to Shakenobe. Then she looked around.

Her surroundings were white and dark.

The multi-level city rose like a cliff in the south and the vast crater where Novgorod had come from was to the north. But both of them were covered with a layer of snow.

So was there location between the city was and Novgorod’s original location.

This place was always just really white, wasn’t it? thought Adele. But now it had other colors for the festival.

Most of the multi-level city’s population was there and that city below the Yamagata Castle was not the only one in attendance. People from the multi-level cities all across the region circled halfway around Novgorod’s original location. They had lit fires, their dancing silhouettes could be seen around the fires, and they were eating and singing.

Adele and the others were on top of a snow platform built up a level higher than everything else. A single diplomatic aerial ship was positioned behind them and they looked out to the festivals from the insulating carpet laid out from there.

“Their dancing is forming circles around the wooden festival towers, but they aren’t moving around them. It’s more like they’re moving in and out from the center of the circle.”

“You noticed? Well, you should be able to tell what that is about.”

“What? It’s a mining dance, isn’t it?” asked Yoshiyasu while viewing the festival stands and the people moving through the gathering places. “Don’t the

towers represent Novgorod's original location and their dance represents the people going there and returning? But..."

Yoshiyasu pointed to a few parts of the hole. There were some pits in the pale shadows of the snow.

"Do the largescale tunnels still exist, but now you're using them to produce weapons?"

"We will use whatever we can. Even ruins of ill fortune."

"...Of ill fortune?"

The fox smiled when Adele asked that.

"Do you know why Mogami and Date, the clans with access to these ruins, were able to build up larger fighting forces than the other clans? And why Mogami was able to build these multi-level cities and fuel production facilities?"

"So..." Adele tilted her head. "Was it thanks to the ability to produce lots of food and access to the mineral resources here?"

"I suppose a Musashi resident wouldn't have noticed since you have the powerful support of IZUMO."

Yoshiaki laughed, but there was nothing Adele could say since it was true. *Musashi is still pretty sheltered*, she realized.

Then Yoshiyasu placed a hand on her chin and looked to Novgorod's original location.

"So it wasn't just minerals... Was it Orei Metallo you mined from this hole?"

"Yes, that's right. We trade with Satomi and provide them for Kantou IZUMO. Date does the same, so Oushuu is the east's leader in production of Black Metal and Thought Metal, you know?"

"I see," said Adele. "A war-torn land will be more heavily affected by the ether, so Orei Metallo can be mined more easily. So that's how much Oushuu's wars have-..."

At that point, Adele realized something.

...Huh?

Something seemed odd to her. Curious, she looked to Yoshiaki who covered her mouth with her fan and narrowed her eyes.

“Satomi President...”

When she looked to Yoshiyasu, the girl brought a hand to her mouth and glanced over at Yoshiaki. The look in her eyes was a powerful one.

Yoshiyasu had realized something too. Was that something the same as Adele’s something? Adele did not know, but she still asked.

“Um, can I ask you something? This original site of Novgorod is...pretty deep, isn’t it? And you said Novgorod was made airborne *after* the war during the Age of Dawn, right?”

Then...

“How can you mine so much Orei Metallo if the war was not actually fought on this land? ...I could understand if it was near the surface, but you’re digging deep pits. It’s almost like something was done using the ether even further down than the bottom of the hole.”

“I think it would be more accurate to say something was ‘dealt with’ there.”

Yoshiaki laughed and waved her fan to open several sign frames. And...

“Well, just wait a little longer. Do that and you should see the mystery for yourself.”

“Mystery?”

“Yes. What happened during the Age of Dawn and where did it lead? Afterwards, I will show you what could be called this region’s hidden festival.”

Now.

“Until then, let us eat and hold our meeting. ...Satomi and Musashi, are you listening? Date and Sviet Rus will be the same. And Sviet Rus will likely have the most trouble of all.”

A chilly air filled Sviet Rus’s meeting room and king’s chamber.

Near the center, Shigenaga felt a cold sweat after bringing the Musashi group

in.

...I hope this will turn out all right.

She more or less stood between the Musashi group and Kagekatsu. She opened a *sankt okno*, tilted it so only she could see, and turned to face Kagekatsu.

Kagekatsu took a deep, white breath and looked back at her, so she used her body as a shield to keep the Musashi group from noticing the gesture she made with her left hand.

She gestured back her way.

She was telling him to pass the conversation this way. When he saw it, he opened his mouth.

“Would you like to say something, Shigenaga?”

“Testament. Chancellor, I believe it would be faster to start by asking them for their suggestions.”

“Hm... You have a point... V-very well. What are your demands...?”

Don't stutter! thought Shigenaga, but there was no helping that. The other leaders and committee heads tensed somewhat, but the Musashi group did not react. They did not seem to have noticed anything out of the ordinary. Which meant...

...Is it going well?

Yes, it was going well. The room's atmosphere and Kagekatsu's speaking likely matched their impression of Uesugi Kagekatsu as “the Terrible”.

This was working. It was working. After all, their Chancellor, Uesugi Kagekatsu, was...

...A rare sort of demon who wouldn't hurt a fly!!

Kagekatsu desperately worked to restrain his racing heart.

...Wh-what am I supposed to do!? What am I supposed to do!?

He had never wanted to be Sviet Rus's Chancellor or their Student Council President. He had come from a good family, he had known the next Chancellors of the other clans, his name had been the same as a future Sviet Rus ruler, he had had the necessary abilities, and he had gotten along well with people. But...

...Why did they have to nominate me for Chancellor just because of that!?

No, it had not been so bad back when he had been nominated. Oushuu had generally settled all international issues through discussions. They had built a generally peaceful relationship with P.A. Oda and everything had been going well.

So by inheriting the name of Kenshin and then the name of Kagekatsu, he had intended to live a demonic life of tranquility. He had intended to provide political leadership, work for the citizens who toiled in the icy land, and maintain stability through discussions with the other nations. As hobbies, he had intended to continue his education, cook, and grow a garden. If possible, he had wanted to happily fall in love, get married, and have around three children. He had also wanted as many friends as possible. His dream was to manage a farm after growing old.

However, those plans had changed after the incident in Mikawa...no, once Nobunaga's name had been inherited in P.A. Oda eight years before. P.A. Oda had rapidly expanded outwards and they had been truly carrying out the history recreations.

The next thing he had known, he could no longer step down from his position. So...

...I-if! If everyone helps me out, I-I'll do my very best!!

He was aware he had the ability. He simply disliked conflict and lacked courage, so...

"...Hm."

He spoke with a deep voice. He desperately hoped the Musashi group would fear him as he opened a *sankt okno* and spoke to those who were ready for the meeting.

"Now, state your demands..."

The Musashi group was holding a lively conversation on their sign frames.

10ZO: “H-he seems to be in a good mood, but I get the feeling the slightest thing could set him off!”

Asama: “By the way, I’m detecting an incredible ether reaction from there. Is Mary-san going all out!?”

Scarred: “Hee hee. You mean like when Master Tenzou confessed to me?”

Four Eyes: “Hmm. I’ll report to the Fairy Queen that she’s perfectly happy.”

Novice: W-wait! Those decisions in England could put Crossunite-kun’s life at risk!”

Silver Wolf: “Anyway, he’s asked for our demands, so what should we tell him?”

Vice President: “Ohh, sorry! I have my hands a little full with all these preparations!”

Me: “Huh? What? You’re taking a bathroom break now!?”

Mal-Ga: “Eh? ...Oh, you’re still at the top of the stairs. And I was hoping to make a quick sketch.”

Almost Everyone: “What did you think was happening!?”

Hori-ko: “Well, that leaves us with no choice. As Musashi’s representative, I have determined I should take the lead. Now, Toori-sama, get down on one knee.”

Me: “You aren’t plotting some way of going over my head, are you? ...Huh?”

Mitotsudaira sensed a smell.

...Blood?

It was not the unique heavy metal smell of a demon’s blood. It was the smell of human blood. And it came from the hallway behind the line of committee heads to their right. And...

“Kagekatsu-kuuun!”

A tall man ran in from the hallway. He had modified a Sviet Rus uniform into a T-short, shorts, socks, and athletic shoes. The emblem on his chest and helmet formed the word “love”.

He was also covered in blood. But...

“Hello! Musashi! Nice to meet you! I am Sviet Rus Vice Chancellor and Vice President Naoe Kanetsugu! I am known as the energetic ‘Man of Love and Attachment’! In Far Eastern, ‘Love and Attachment’ is Aizen, which sounds just like iron in German! But this is Russia, so that’s entirely irrelevant!!”

10ZO: “I think we found a friend for Itoken-dono.”

Obscene: “Yes! I sense an atmosphere I could get along with quite well!”

Sticky King: “Kh. Maybe we should have gone to Sviet Rus after all!”

Wouldn’t you freeze? wondered Mitotsudaira, but she held her tongue.

However, the refreshing bloody pulp gave a carefree smile as he spun out in front of the committee heads and made a flip. Then he spread his arms.

“I was pursuing the Novgorod forces who have inherited the local Shibata name! I thought we might be able to settle this through discussions, but they made a serious attack and gave me a very bad day! I was making short work of them with my love attacks, but when you’re pinning one of them down on the battlefield in the north-south position, isn’t it just awful when some of the others surround you and refuse to read the atmosphere!?” said the bloody pulp of love. “Anyway, Kagekatsu-kuuun!? I lost and came running back, so you’re going to scold me, aren’t you!?”

“You...bastaaaaaaaaaaaaard!!!!!”

The demon king stood up with his iron staff in hand.

“Why would you appear before me so badly injured...!? Don’t think I can just overlook this...!”

Kagekatsu sensed his own desperation.

...Kanetsugu-kun!

That man was a rare person in Sviet Rus who was human yet had strength rivalling a demon. He also had a wonderful personality, understood Kagekatsu's timidity, and helped assist him.

So Kagekatsu could not overlook the man's injuries. He should have received treatment from the Health Committee before coming here, but he had likely wanted to personally report on the battle as soon as possible.

Kagekatsu had to heal him and healing spells were one of his greatest specialties.

"You bastard...!"

Everyone thinks bastard is such a dirty word, thought Kagekatsu. But it merely refers to the marital status of one's parents and shows my understanding of his past.

"Kanetsugu, you bastard...!"

He raised his metal staff while placing a spell inside.

He used light. Specifically, lightning.

In Russia, all illness and pain had long been blamed on evil spirits. So...

"Ohhhh...!"

The lightning-wrapped iron of healing caught Kanetsugu on the side of the face.

It was a solid blow. The healing had definitely reached the core of his body.

The lightning was an excellent tool. It numbed the recipient before the healing blow landed, so there was no pain and the electrical conduction effect spread the healing around their body. The electric current loosened their muscles and illuminated what he was doing.

After receiving the lightning attack, Kanetsugu bounced along the stone floor, but the strike would have numbed his entire body and provided first aid. However...

...This isn't enough!

Kagekatsu had to drive the “evil spirit” of the injuries out of his entire body. That was Russian-style healing.

Begone, evil spirits! willed Kagekatsu as he struck Kanetsugu.

“You are...”

These injuries were serious, so he had to use even filthier words to insult them and drive them out. So...

“...nothing more than a dung beetle...!”

Kagekatsu delivered one lightning strike after another.

“So take this...!!”

Be healed!

“Is this still not enough to kill you...!?”

I need to rid him of this pain as soon as possible!!

“No one wants the likes of you around...!!”

The hall was filled with white light and a deep rumbling after each lightning blow. Kanetsugu had lost consciousness as he bounced again and again only to be struck by a new blow each time.

Lightning was summoned from everywhere in the air, so the entire hall became a place of electricity and impacts.

Asama: “Ehh!? W-wait, shouldn’t you stop him!?”

10ZO: “Th-this truly is a demon’s reign of terror! He doesn’t allow even the slightest failure!”

Silver Wolf: “And, um, can we really hold a meeting after this?”

Hori-ko: “Judge. I am learning a lot.”

Everyone had to ask “About what?” as Horizon pulled a teacup from somewhere and took a breath. But in the meantime, Kagekatsu stopped moving.

The staff struck, the final lightning strike burst, and it vanished into the air.

It was over.

Kagekatsu placed his staff on Kanetsugu's limp form and worked to catch his breath.

"I will leave it at that for now... Health Committee Head, you must carry him out of here immediately. Heh heh... And treat him with care. Yes, do not misinterpret me here. I want you to treat him with the utmost care..."

And...

"Yes, treat him with great care to express my...happiness that he returned alive after such a devastating loss. Heh heh heh... And make sure to give him the best of food to eat. I'm sure you know what I mean. Hah hah...!"

Worshiper: "Th-the hidden implications there are pretty amazing! He's one hell of a demon!"

Novice: "Dammit! I should have gone there instead of becoming a wall drawing! Kagekatsu-sama is so cool! He's the ideal demon king!!"

Four Eyes: "Not again... If you love him so much, why not become one of his retainers?"

Meanwhile, Kagekatsu returned to his throne and looked to Shigenaga.

"Well? How was that, Shigenaga...?"

Kagekatsu saw Shigenaga nod.

"I believe that was a most suitable treatment for someone returning from a defeat..."

Shigeko: "Don't ask me that! You caught me off guard! Why are you always like this, Chancellor!?"

KageV: "Eh!? Ehh? B-but if I don't ask...I-I don't know if I screwed up. Um, but, uh, Shige-chan? Wh-what, um, do you mean by 'like this'?"

Shigeko: "Just get this meeting over with before you let anything slip!!"

Tomo-no-Bu: "Um, Shigenaga-kun? I don't think you should be so rude."

Shigenaga glanced at an elderly human who stood down the hallway. He was 1st Special Duty Officer Saitou Tomonobu and he lowered his head when she looked his way.

Tomo-no-Bu: “We will give Kanetsugu a special dining hall coupon and some top quality vodka. He was investigating P.A. Oda’s forces as well as Novgorod’s, after all. Um, and when should we let him take a bath?”

KageV: “Eh? Can’t you do that tonight? All of his injuries and pain should be gone. Oh, but he must be exhausted, so make sure he doesn’t fall asleep in the bath. And give him three days’ worth of medicine just in case...”

Also...

KageV: “This may not be the best time, but is there any way we can make the expansions to the botanical garden and zoo like I mentioned before...? We should be at war soon, right? So, um, it may not be the time, but I’m sure the children in our territory will be worried. If we can put out information on a daily basis about how that kind of enjoyable places are being built, that can help support them and it should really help their parents too... So can’t we do it? Or would it be going too soft?”

Asa-no-Bu: “No, I think it is an excellent idea that can also lessen our warrior’s concerns for their children.”

The committee heads also nodded and spoke in unison.

“Such superb judgment!”

Good, thought Kagekatsu while feeling himself grow timid.

And he knew it was childish, but he still instructed them to announce this decision in a public forum right away.

It only took a few seconds for this decision he was so fond of to be uploaded to a Sviet Rus site as a real promise. This was his authority as Ivan IV. So...

...I’m glad.

I love this side of things.

We are at war now and I am considerately telling the others to fight, but my heart can’t seem to focus on that side of things. I enjoy training in combat and it

delights me when my skills can help them in some way, but I can't help but love "these things" so much. And it makes me grow timid when my heart isn't in the same place as theirs.

The more I help them, the more I realize my desires are different and the more timid I grow. But...

"Hm..."

Kagekatsu asked a question so he could respond to everyone's efforts.

"Allow me to ask again: What are your demands, people of Musashi...?"

Chapter 71: Allocators of the Points at Issue

第七十一章

『問題点の配点者達』



孤独の
行く道
通る道
配点 (拒絶)

It is a lonely

Path of travel

And path of passage

Point Allocation (Rejection)

...Our demands, hm?

Masazumi responded to Kagekatsu's statement by moving her three main sign frames out in front and taking a breath.

...I guess this means we're starting with Sviet Rus.

Vice President: "Representatives of Date, Mogami, Sviet Rus, and the minor clans, thank you for holding these three simultaneous meetings with us. I am Musashi Ariadust Academy Vice President Honda Masazumi. Currently, Musashi is carrying out the history recreation by acquiring the cooperation of the other nations and also engaging Hashiba in battle. I would like for us to continue based on that assumption. And..."

She inhaled, raised a hand in her heart, and spoke from her throat.

Vice President: "Date, Mogami, Sviet Rus, and the minor clans... Musashi would like your cooperation. I would like to start by discussing that."

"Wait."

Mitotsudaira heard a deep voice cut in.

She saw an old man standing in front of the committee heads on the right. She was fairly certain his name was Saitou Tomonobu. He walked toward them with folded rectangular panels on his back and he stroked his beard.

"I understand you would like our cooperation. I understand that quite well after you expressed your policies during the earlier special student general assembly. But that is what you want. What we want is something else."

Saitou called out to Kagekatsu.

“Chancellor, tell them what it is that Sviet Rus wants.”

KageV: “Eh!? Wh-what we want? Wh-why do you have to ask the impossible!? No one ever told me about this! What is going on here!? You can’t do this!!”

Shigeko: “Um, wait! What *are* you doing, Saitou-san!? Please stop showing up late just to say things we didn’t discuss in advance! What are we supposed to do!?”

Tomo-no-bu: “Ehh!? Oh, I’m so sorry. I’m so, soooooo sorry! Umm, PR Committee Head! Send all the information to the Chancellor right away!!”

Masazumi saw Sviet Rus’s response.

The Terrible: “Heh heh heh. People of Musashi... My Sviet Rus is currently combating the warriors of P.A. Oda’s Shibata forces in our southwest territory. And in the east, Shigenaga there is enduring attacks from Mogami... Do you know why that is?”

Yes, thought Masazumi.

...I do know.

Vice President: “Sviet Rus has realized that Hashiba’s Taiko Kenchi land survey has reached Jouetsu, so you are including Hashiba’s history recreation with your own.”

“That’s right,” added Neshinbara.

Novice: “After Nobunaga’s death, Hashiba begins to take over the Far East and bans all war in the nation. Oushuu was given a ban on armed conflict, but Mogami attacked Uesugi, Date got involved, and it led to the Battle of Jugorigahara.”

But...

Novice: “Even though Mogami and Date ignored Hashiba’s ban on war, they supported Hashiba when he attacked Houjou and swore allegiance. And during

Hashiba's punishment of Oushuu after Houjou's destruction, their territory was assured. The same is true of Uesugi, so all three of them will gain plenty of territory and become great nations."

Perhaps that meant the Oushuu and Jouetsu forces were simply good at dodging blame. Or perhaps Hashiba's influence had been unable to fully reach Oushuu since he was based in Kinki. But...

"That is bad news for the current three nations."

If the three nations sided with Musashi now, they risked having their territory reduced or having restrictions placed on them during Hashiba's reign. Also...

Novice: "The Uesugi clan fights against the Matsudaira clan during the decisive Battle of Sekigahara. After that battle, they are ordered to move to other land and their territory is reduced. And of course, those orders come from the victors: Matsudaira."

Masazumi knew that.

Their territory was settled once during Hashiba's generation and again by Matsudaira after Sekigahara. Those were two different versions of Oushuu and Sviet Rus's territory.

Sviet Rus was doomed to have their territory reduced after Sekigahara because they would ultimately oppose Matsudaira. So they could not afford to oppose Hashiba here and now.

...If they did that, they might get their territory reduced twice.

Mal-Ga: "Don't worry. ...We can solve all of this through war."

Vice President: "Dammit! This time! This time I won't do it...!"

Gold Mar: Is it just me or is Seijun getting more and more hopeless?"

She unfortunately had to agree. But Sviet Rus was not the only problem.

Vice President: "You mentioned attacks from Mogami. Mogami, don't you have something to say about this?"

"That's right," said Yoshiaki as she listened to the festival music in the light of

the two moons. “Mogami and Date don’t care too much about Hashiba’s territorial decision. After all, we assist Hashiba in their attack on Houjou, so our territory is assured. But...”

Yoshiaki raised her cup and Shakenobe poured sake into it.

“After that, Mogami and Date betray Hashiba, mon! Lady Yoshiaki has to get back at them for Lady Komahime, mon! That’s right, mon!”

“I can live such a stress-free life with you around, Shakenobe.”

“You’re making me blush, mon!”

“Ah,” said the vassal before quickly typing at her sign frame.

Flat Vassal: “Um, Vice President, you can’t say anything about *Shakenobe* pouring *sake*!”

Vice President: “Please, Balfette. Stop making me laugh while I’m trying to think.”

She has a low boiling point, thought Yoshiaki, but she continued speaking. She took a sip of her drink and enjoyed the heat of the sake on her throat more than the flavor.

“We battle the major nation of Sviet Rus. The Battle of Dewa is the final largescale battle for Mogami, Date, and Sviet Rus and it is paired with Sekigahara. On Matsudaira’s orders, Mogami and Date attempt to stop the Sviet Rus forces headed to Sekigahara for Hashiba. ...But the battle has no clear winner,” explained Yoshiaki. “However, that brings an end to Oushuu’s time as a region of war...but that also means our borders are set and we can no longer focus on expanding our nation. Do you know what that means, Satomi?”

“Judge. After Sekigahara, Matsudaira has opened up Kantou and Satomi is left to defend it. But...”

Yoshiaki responded to Yoshiyasu’s look with a smile.

“Yoshiaki, how far out are you looking?”

“Eh?” said the vassal with a tilt of the head.

Yoshiyasu started to say something.

“———”

But she closed her mouth and looked away, so Yoshiaki smiled.

“Satomi, you have political thoughts of your own as Satomi’s President, don’t you? In that case, you can say it then. I generally enjoy seeing people struggle.”

“Um, what are you talking about? ...Does something happen in Mogami’s future?”

When the vassal asked her question, Yoshiyasu glanced over at Yoshiaki and Shakenobe twisted around with a troubled look.

Yoshiaki smiled bitterly, sighed, and told them to calm down.

“The thing about Mogami is...we have trouble finding an heir, a civil war breaks out...and our title as a clan is more or less revoked.”

“Even though you worked so hard to survive the Sekigahara era and gained so much territory!? Wait a minute!”

The vassal typed on her sign frame’s keyboard.

Flat Vassal: “Um, Vice President! Isn’t there anything we can do about that!?”

I know what you mean, thought Masazumi. Mogami had had a decent foundation, but they had still acquired a large amount of territory and settled things inside their territory in more or less a single generation. That was due to Yoshiaki’s political skill and decision-making ability, but the issue of an heir had been unavoidable.

Novice: “One castle per domain and the revocation of clanhood... Those were the laws for warrior clans established by Matsudaira after Sekigahara. Even a pro-Matsudaira clan has to follow the laws.”

Vice President: “To add to that, Matsudaira seemed to care about and place some importance on Mogami. According to the Testament descriptions, Mogami was relocated so they had some way to survive.”

Silver Wolf: “That’s right. After Mogami’s clanhood was revoked, the non-heir members became retainers of Mito Matsudaira. ...And according to a footnote,

one of them becomes the chief retainer who acts as my inspector.”

“But,” said Gin from down the stairs. She was likely monitoring their surroundings for security purposes because her patrolling footsteps could be heard with her voice. “Mogami still loses all of the territory they had built up.”

When she added “they failed to stick the landing”, the Tachibana Husband looked up from the top of the stairs.

“Gin.”

“Yes, I know. ...That is the way of the Warring States period and the destiny of all warrior clans.”

“No, I was going to mention how kind you are to worry about someone other than Tres España.”

Masazumi trembled.

...What is this atmosphere!? Is it love!? And Asama and I are in between you two! Should you really be doing this now!?

But no one else seemed to notice and the sign frame displayed a comment from Naomasa in the engine division.

Smoking Girl: “Komahime died and is now a ghost, right? If she’s on Hashiba’s side now, that means Mogami no longer has an heir...”

That’s right, sighed Masazumi.

Vice President: “But that is why Mogami is free to act. They have no reason to obey Hashiba, so they can do whatever they want. ...That’s what it means.”

Silver Wolf: “Then when Mogami started firing yesterday before you called out to them, was that a change in their mental state?”

It isn’t just that, thought Masazumi.

Vice President: “It was Komahime.”

This was going to be a cruel thing to say, but she could not get this started without saying it. It had to have been the same for Yoshiaki, so Masazumi relaxed her shoulders and continued.

Vice President: “Komahime committed suicide before going to Hashiba. ...But

that wasn't because she didn't want to go to Hashiba. Isn't that right, Mogami Yoshiaki?"

"That is correct."

Adele saw Yoshiaki smile with her eyebrows raised. But...

...That wasn't why?

She knew Yoshiaki did not have a simple personality. Looking at her history and yesterday's battle, it was obvious she could do harsh things, but she seemed endlessly kind to her own.

She's a ruler, was how Adele viewed it. But Komahime was the greatest of Yoshiaki's own, so why had the girl committed suicide?

"You mean it wasn't because she didn't want to be separated from you and made into Mogami's enemy?"

"Vassal...that is most likely correct, but you have it in reverse." Yoshiyasu sighed next to her. "Komahime was as stubborn as me, wasn't she? ...If she did go to Hashiba, she assumed you would be unable to oppose Hashiba, didn't she?"

"Then...?"

"Komahime understood and believed that Matsudaira would ultimately rule the Far East. She knew Mogami had to side with Matsudaira and have the clan's fate handled through interpretations. And so she felt Mogami needed to oppose Hashiba."

"That would mean..." muttered Adele as she realized the meaning of Komahime's actions. "Komahime-san really cares for Yoshiaki-san, doesn't she? If she was worried what would happen to Mogami after she was gone, she was essentially worrying for Yoshiaki-san. That's why she committed suicide, isn't it? With her dead, she was telling you to oppose Hashiba..."

Oh, thought Adele. *So that's why Komahime bowed after Yoshiaki's attack yesterday. That attack and bow meant Yoshiaki did what Komahime had wanted. As for why...*

“Komahime-san wanted you to remain just as strong and cool as you’d always been, didn’t she?”

“Vassal, you enjoy romance, don’t you?”

Yoshiaki smiled, but slowly covered her face with her fan.

She then took a deep breath and released a trembling breath. After that, Mogami’s ruler filled her lungs once more.

“Komahime also loved that sort of story. She was always begging me to tell them.”

She laughed.

“Let me tell you a story now that Komahime has left. It is the story of Mogami Yoshiaki. I will show you how the Fox of Ushuu acts. That is the way of Mogami. ...What about the rest of you?”

“We of the Date clan...”

Suzu heard a voice. The dance time had ended and they were now in Sendai Castle’s great hall which contained a stepped platform.

About ten meters in front of her, Masamune sat in a throne atop the platform. A short sword for self-defense sat in her lap and she held it in both hands.

“...naturally hope to establish an amicable relationship with Matsudaira.”

It was a short statement, but it held great meaning.

...That means...they will side with...Musashi.

Just like Mogami, Date would become a great nation of Oushuu and was choosing their long-term benefit. They were looking at the borders established by Matsudaira more than the territory established by Hashiba. But...

Novice: “That phrasing does not mention when they hope to establish that amicable relationship. And ‘hope to’ implies some conditions must be met first.”

“But,” added Neshinbara and Suzu understood why.

No one around her had reacted to Masamune's statement.

The members of the minor clans had been sent from the hall earlier.

Only Katakura, Narumi, and the committee heads were here. They were all the Date clan's inner circle. They were all here for the meeting, but none of them was tense in the slightest.

There was only one explanation.

And Masamune gave that explanation.

"As you know, the Date clan will soon be quite busy. ...Including our cooperation with other clans, we must go through the process to disinherit my brother Kojiro. Once that is complete, we can begin focusing on working with Musashi."

...I knew it.

Urquiga spoke quietly while standing behind her on the right so he could protect her at a moment's notice.

"So her memories are being consumed."

Vice President: "But, well, this was expected."

Masazumi spoke.

Vice President: "In the previous negotiations with my father and the others, they had concluded that they did not need to take into consideration anything unrealistic that Lady Masamune said."

I see, thought Suzu with a mental smile of relief.

...That may be true.

The "reality" that Masamune saw was not the same as the one everyone else saw. She did not remember Suzu even after meeting her twice before.

Negotiations could never progress if they took her statements at face value. So Suzu could only think one thing: *Sorry.*

...Kojiro-san must have been important to her.

They were discussing things with the knowledge that Kojiro had been killed.

Suzu had to avoid thinking they were deceiving Masamune, but it was true they were leaving her behind for their own convenience.

Was she too soft if she felt guilty? But...

Vice President: “Sorry, Mukai. This business with Lady Masamune is placing a real burden on you.”

Bell: “Um, no, I-I don’t...mind. Masa...mune-san...will speak with me... whenever I see her.”

It would be sad if she stopped speaking with her, but that was not the point. Even after losing her memories, Masamune would still speak with her each time they met, so she did not mind.

The burden was on Masamune. She had lost her memories and the person she most wished to speak with was no longer in Date. So...

...Is there anything we can do...for her?

As soon as she wondered that, a sign frame appeared near her face.

<Date Clan Network: Divine transmission from Vice President Katakura>

They intended to hold a second meeting without Masamune. As the ambassador, she had to accept, so she quietly did so and the line connected.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Looks like you’ve connected. I’m so grateful I might just cry. Anyway, we’ll be holding the real meeting here. Got that?”

Suzu nodded and Masazumi’s words appeared on this sign frame as well.

Vice President: “Judge. We will leave this decision up to you, Date.”

That signaled the beginning. They were looking to the three nations and Musashi’s futures, and Sviet Rus and Mogami had already given their opinions. And now that Date was giving theirs without Masamune...

...It’s really beginning.

With that thought, Suzu quieted her breathing as Katakura’s voice gave the opening statement.

Kagetsuna-kun: “Now, allow me to give Date’s view.”

An emotionless voice spoke beyond her held breath.

Kagetsuna-kun: “The Date clan will obey Masamune as our leader. All of our decisions will be based on what she hopes for. They come from a time when Kojirou still lived and not from the current environment. In other words, it is all based on the way things were two weeks ago. That is all.”

For a moment, Suzu did not understand what Katakura meant.

...That means...

They would view Date and the other nations as they were two weeks ago.

That meant they were viewing Musashi as they had been two weeks prior.

“Then...”

Their decision was one of rejection.

Chapter 72: Returners to the Borderline

第七十二章

『境界線への再起者達』

人はどこまで
今を己の峰とする
配点 (これからまた)



How often can people

Make “now” their peak?

Point Allocation (It Will Happen Again)

“I get what it means...but are they serious!?”

Yoshiyasu voiced her opinion of Date’s decision relayed to her by Musashi.

The Date clan was matching Masamune lost memories by rewinding their view of Musashi to just before Kojirou’s death. But...

...Does Date really understand what that means!?

“Anyone with half a brain could tell what kind of trouble and grudges that will create!!”

The vassal lowered the ends of her eyebrows and raised her right hand.

“Um, sorry, Satomi President, but I can’t tell. Could you maybe explain...?”

Yoshiyasu groaned and fell silent as the salmon whispered into the vassal’s ear.

“You must not become a short-tempered girl like that, mon. You have nothing to feel bad about, mon.”

“See how stress-free life is with Shakenobe around?” added Yoshiaki.

Dammit, am I the bad guy here!? thought Yoshiyasu with a clenched fist in her heart, but Yoshiaki looked toward the distant festival instead of her.

Yoshiaki was apparently leaving the explanation to Yoshiyasu, so Yoshiyasu turned to the puzzled vassal.

“Um... Well, there’s nothing wrong with a normal person not getting it. It’s a political issue.”

“R-really?”

“She’s lying, mon. She is merely trying to smooth things over, mon.”

I’m going to fillet you, she thought while glaring at the salmon who promptly hid behind the vassal.

Well, as long as I can't see him, she concluded while scratching her head.

“Date Kojirou died two weeks ago. What happens if the Musashi’s state is rewound to there?”

“That was when we had just started on the plan to remodel the Musashi, right?”

“Yes. Musashi had just suffered a defeat. You had been unable to defeat Hashiba and you had yet to remodel to secure your new military power.”

Meaning...

“You have nothing to offer when it comes to the war-related aspects of your Vice President’s decision at the special student general assembly.”

...This isn't good.

Tenzou felt a cold sweat. Musashi planned to head out and fight Hashiba. But if they were viewed as they had been two weeks before...

...They might reject everything by saying they doubt we could win the battle.

That would be troublesome. They would have to offer a great number of privileges to overturn all of those rejections and Date might make substitute demands. Also...

Marube-ya: “This is bad. I mean, this won’t just be Date...”

That was right. Tenzou looked to Saitou and the Sviet Rus Committee Heads.

“Excuse us,” said Saitou before beginning a discussion around Kagekatsu. Tenzou could read their lips, so he could pick up on some of what they were saying.

...As I thought, they're trying to apply Date's conditions to themselves because this is a three nations meeting...

If just one nation had an advantage, it would create a gap between them and the other two. So...

Nine-Tail Girl: “That sounds like fun, so we will be doing it as well.”

That was fast! thought Tenzou as his cold sweat grew.

What would happen at this rate?

...None of the nations will admit to Musashi's value in battle, but we will have to negotiate on the assumption that we want their assistance in battling Hashiba!

If it was only Date, it might be possible to get through it by offering privileges and accepting substitute demands, but Mogami had already requested to use the same conditions as Date and Sviet Rus would likely follow.

...This is...

But then he heard a voice.

It was Horizon. She relaxed her standing pose and once more pulled a teacup from somewhere.

“So Date had laid a trap. They pretended to be cooperative while laying the groundwork, but they chose conditions advantageous to their own nation during the meeting proper. Normally, this would be the time to leave the negotiation table...but to Musashi, the cooperation of Oushuu and Sviet Rus is something we would like if at all possible. No, make that three somethings. I have determined we are being given the polar opposite of a good deal.”

She nodded and took a sip of tea.

“Yes, this has been an excellent lesson.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “I appreciate hearing Musashi's princess say that.”

Suzu listened to Katakura's voice over the divine transmission.

...He sounds...pained?

There was a somewhat guilty tone to his voice that was almost reminiscent of anger. It was low and still, but...

Kagetsuna-kun: “Our policy is to match everything to Masamune and her lost memories. But don't pity us or see it as a farce. This is a gamble on Date's part. After all, we have to side with Matsudaira in the end. But...the question is when

we start doing that. Masamune's memories stop when Kojirou died two weeks ago. That means at about a week after the Musashi entered the Ariake. So please think about this."

Think about...

Kagetsuna-kun: "You have just suffered a defeat, so how are you going to get Masamune on your side? We informed her of the previous special student general assembly by telling her Musashi's will is alive and well, so she understands your motivation and intent. But the situation around her as an individual has not changed from shortly after Musashi's defeat. Keep that in mind during these talks."

Suzu felt that was a very difficult thing to do. After all...

Smoking Girl: "If we can't use Musashi's ability to fight while negotiating, how are we supposed to talk about a future where we fight Hashiba?"

Exactly. Furthermore, this meeting was with three nations at once, but those nations were in a position to share their benefits and losses. So...

Marube-ya: "Judge. ...Here it is. Sviet Rus just sent a message to Masazumi via their committees. It says they would like the same conditions as Date and Mogami. It's even signed by someone named Saitou."

That settled it.

From here on, they could not use the Musashi's ability in battle as a bargaining chip.

...That means...

The three nations would not trust them to be able to fight Hashiba.

...And after we all worked so hard...

A lot of the students had spent the nights in tents pitched on the schoolyard, in classrooms, in the underground gym, or in other similar places. They had taken shifts, but they had been working twenty-four hours a day.

After working, they had bathed at Suzu's bathhouse or the Asama Shrine's spring, so all of the bathhouses had been running twenty-four hours a day recently.

They had all spoken to each other there and Suzu had heard a lot of what they had said. It saddened her that she could not use all of that here, but...

...Ah.

Suzu realized Musashi lacking the ability to fight created a certain change to the negotiations.

Bell: “Musashi can’t...go to war.”

Wise Sister: “Yeah! Even Suzu has caught on to the deepest secrets of Musashi’s decision making process! Excellent! I’ll give you a nice groping later to celebrate! With an Ootsubaki spell, they’ll probably grow quite a bit!”

Asama: “What do you mean probably? But it is true this restricts Masazumi from going to war. I know that has to be a disappointment, but let’s do our best here, Masazumi.”

Four Eyes: “This is the nation we were negotiating with...?”

Vice President: “Dammit! Is anyone on my side!? Anyone at all!?”

Masazumi sighed in her heart.

...So Date set us up.

She had known about Masamune’s situation, but during their previous exchanges of information and laying of groundwork...

...They never said anything about returning everything to the time of Kojirou’s death!

There was no point in complaining now. When performing their checks, her father and the rest of the Provisional Council had used the people most familiar with the respective clans. To have that suddenly overturned meant the trap had been targeted at someone who knew them well.

She understood all too well what Date was trying to do.

“They’re putting up a greedy resistance to ensure their future stability.”

For Oushuu, this would almost entirely settle the territorial war fought there during the Age of Dawn. These were the people who had never succumbed to the powerful and always continued resisting, so it was Musashi's failure for not understanding what that unknown past would lead them to do.

They had likely gone for as big a victory as possible.

Also...

Novice: "We can't force Date to discuss their Seiryu problem here."

Vice President: "Judge. They've set up this three nations meeting so it's impossible for the three nations to lose. Even if Date wanted to nullify the meeting, they could not back out on their own. All three nations would have to back out at once...so the best move for them is to get us to back out instead."

It was a matter of pride.

Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date were nations and academies at war. If the negotiation was nullified due to any one of them, that one would be placed in an inferior position among the three.

They were taking advantage of Musashi's position, but they made no attempt to hide it and had gone all out with it.

...So they won't accept Musashi's ability to fight, hm?

Then how was she supposed to gain the cooperation of the three nations?

Backing out of the negotiations would only push them toward Hashiba. At best, Mogami would stay with them, but Mogami would eventually have their clanhood revoked.

Mogami's backing would only be viewed as a temporary thing.

...So...

Masazumi thought about what to do.

The three nations meeting should have been about the power to fight and cooperation. That was why Masazumi had corrected all of the problems and confirmed in which direction Musashi was headed at the special student

general assembly.

But their opponents had rejected all power Musashi had.

And unless she accepted that rejection, the meeting could not continue.

...Dammit.

They refused to accept anything Musashi had done or was doing. No matter what she said, that refusal was their condition for discussing this in the first place.

She wished she was ignorant enough of politics to call this unfair. After all, her opponents had their own profits and losses and had their own ways of benefitting and finding relief.

She knew that perfectly well, but...

...I...have a choice.

She could give the three nations every possible privilege and serve them in every way possible to gain their cooperation.

That would mean sacrificing Musashi, but it would save the Far East and stop the Apocalypse. But...

“...No.”

She could not sacrifice anyone to save something.

Yes. That was what they had decided. And it was the lesson they had learned at Mikatagahara.

They had to save everyone while smiling.

...Then...

Masazumi thought about what they had to do here if they were to save everyone while smiling.

She was unsure whether or not she could just ask the idiot who had been left with that wish.

And then...

Me: “Hey. Can I say something real quick?”

The idiot spoke to her.

Me: “Can you all listen for a moment? I just asked Tenzou and it sounds like we’re in a bit of a tricky situation.”

Vice President: “Sorry. I made a bit of a mistake. I’ll fix it.”

Me: “Eh? Oh, that’s not what I meant. That doesn’t matter.”

Hey...

Me: “What is a king?”

And...

Me: “I thought about this a bit back at Mikawa and I thought I had an idea of the answer. I thought about it some more at England, I met the sun nudist at IZUMO, I asked Nate Maman about it...and a lot happened at Magdeburg and Mikatagahara. Oh, and a lot’s still happening now.”

So...



Horizon on the Middle of Nowhere

境界線

Middle of Nowhere



のホライズン
Horizon on the W









Me: “Seijun.”

Vice President: “What?”

Me: “You’re there, aren’t you? You haven’t gone away?”

Vice President: “Yes, I’m here.”

Me: “Then Futayo?”

Tonbokiri: “Sorry. I fell asleep for a bit there.”

Me: Oh, so you’re there. Okay. Tenzo...is here I guess.... Yeah, he’s here...”

10ZO: “Wh-why are you trailing off like that!?”

Me: “Don’t worry about it. Don’t worry about it. ...I guess there’s not much point, but Mary.”

Scarred: “Yes. Thank you for all the help you provide Master Tenzou and me.”

Me: “Wow... I’m not sure what to say when someone takes things so seriously... Okay, Uqui.”

Uqui: “Judge. I am doing well.”

Me: “I’m not gonna lose to you! ...So are you there, Gold Mar?”

Gold Mar: “Hm? You need something? I’m working right now.”

Me: “Oh, thanks for all the deliveries. ...What about Black Mal?”

Mal-Ga: “Judge. ...I’m here.”

Me: “Sure. Smuggle me some more doujinshi sometime, okay? ...Are you there, Naomasa?”

Smoking Girl: “I’m trying to work. ...But I am here.”

Me: “You can act like a real woman sometimes and it’s scary. ...What about Shiro and Auge-chan?”

Marube-ya: “We are. Shiro-kun and me both. And it’s all thanks to you.”

Me: “A merchant’s thanks is a scary thing. ...Neshinbara.”

Novice: “What is it? Oh, we haven’t spoken since I was a wall drawing, have we? It’s good to be back.”

Me: “Sure. And lend me some porn once I’m back, okay? ...Um, Bell-san.”

Bell: “Eh!? Oh, y-yes. I’m...here...?”

Me: “Yeah, sorry, sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you. Take care of things there. ... Is Noriki there?”

Laborer: “You know I am, so you don’t need to ask.”

Me: “Yeah, but you know I’m gonna ask anyway... Okay, Adele.”

Flat Vassal: “Oh, yes, yes. Judge. What is it?”

Me: “Well, now that We has fixed your mobile shell, show it to me sometime. ...Flat Girl.”

Righteousness: “Hm? What do you want?”

Me: “This’ll probably be a pain, but take care of things okay? ...Imperial Boy.”

Azuma: “Oh, yes. Miriam is here too. She says good luck.”

Me: “Your shtick sure has changed... Okay, Ohiroshiki.”

Worshiper: “Judge. Leave things here to me!”

Me: “You aren’t at some dangerous peeping spot, are you? ...Hassan.”

83: “Do you want some curry?”

Me: “Deliver some to my house. I’ll make curry bread out of it. ...Now Itoken.”

Obscene: “Ha ha ha! Good to hear from you! It has been far too long!”

Me: “Yeah. It does seem far too long since I’ve spoken with everyone like this. You there too, Nenji?”

Sticky King: “Yes. I am sure you have given a lot of things a lot of thought since Mikawa. If not, we might have gathered around you, but we would not have done so at a single call like this.”

Me: “You talk too much, Nenji. ...Now Pe-yan.”

Bucket: “...♪”

Almost Everyone: “Can’t you talk when it’s just text!?”

Me: “I don’t think my heart could take it if he just started talking on and on. ...

You there, Sis?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. I am, foolish brother. But you won’t get anything from me just for calling me up for no reason!”

Me: “At least give me a snack. ...Okay, Nate. Even if you are right in front of me.”

Silver Wolf: “Judge. ...No matter where she is, a knight will always answer her king’s call.”

Me: “Good to see you haven’t changed. And don’t you ever change. ...Are you there, Asama?”

Asama: “Eh!? Wh-what do you want all of a sudden!?”

Me: “Well, you’ve always helped me out so much and I haven’t said it as much as I should, so...I look forward to the help you’ll give me in the future.”

Asama: “That’s where you would normally say thank you!!”

Me: “Now this shrine maiden is making demands... Oh, but, um, Horizon.”

Hori-ko: “This whole thing sounds an awful lot like one long death flag to me.”

Me: “She said it! She just said what I was thinking but had enough sense not to say!”

Hori-ko: “Anyway, what do you want? Why are you hogging the divine network like this?”

“Well,” said Toori.

Me: “This is a troublesome situation, right? A really troublesome one.”

No, he had feeling their situation had been troublesome for a while now. But...

Me: “Now that I think about it, things have been trouble for all of you ever since Mikawa.”

Silver Wolf: “Um, my king? It has not been that much trouble for us...”

Me: “Yeah, judge, judge. That’s because you all can handle it. But...you’ve

spent a lot of time lost in thought lately, haven't you? When you're working, when you're in class, when you're eating with me, you're always lost in thought or discussing things with each other at length. It's been that way for three weeks now. Ever since we lost."

Hey.

Me: "Is that necessary for your dreams?"

Asama: "Well..."

Me: "If anything, it's necessary to make me king. You're doing it for what I started at Mikawa and what I've dragged the rest of you along on."

Then...

Me: "What am I doing now? No...I've been thinking that ever since England. What does it mean for me to become a king? Yoshitsune said it was to do whatever you wanted, Anne showed through her actions that it's to guide and protect everything, and Matsunaga was more the Yoshitsune type but while putting up as much of a resistance as he could. Yoshiyori chose a method I don't like so he could tell me not to be like him. And he told me to smile. And Nate Maman told me that, if I wanted to make everyone's dreams come true, I had to become a king that could make my own dream come true."

But...

Me: "I feel like it's fine as long as all of your dreams come true. I still don't really know what my dream is, but there is one thing I can say."

That was...

Me: "If you're getting all depressed and find you can't act on my behalf, you're getting it all backwards. I made that request to Asama so I could make sure that wouldn't happen. I said I would support you to make sure you could make a kingdom that could make your dreams come true and to make sure you wouldn't be defeated before that happened. So...how should I put it? Things are getting pretty tough and you might be feeling down. But don't you forget. Don't you ever forget, okay?"

He said it.

Me: “I’ll take on your impossibilities. Don’t forget that. I’m in charge of all of your impossibilities, so don’t you ever give up. Don’t you ever let it get to you. If things are looking bad, just tell yourself you can leave it with me and come pay me a visit. ...That’s the king I can be right now.”

So...

Me: “Since I can do that, I’m a king right now. I’ve been a new type of king since Mikawa.”

Listen.

Me: “Nate.”

Silver Wolf: “Judge!”

Me: “You’re my first knight, so you know what to leave with me, right? Even if everyone’s starting to look down, tell them things aren’t that bad. Sis, you take care of that too.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. What a hopeless boy.”

Me: “Yeah, I can be pretty careless. ...Um, Asama, with that, well, keep looking after me. My contract with you is important for being a king, but I’m as frail as a rabbit, so protect me and make sure I don’t die.”

Asama: “...”

Asama: “You don’t make it easy to respond to you, Toori-kun. ...Understood. I will protect you as much as I can.”

Me: “That’ll be a huge help. And if anything’s impossible for you, leave it with me. I feel like that’s setting up a bit of a feedback loop, but thanks. ...And Horizon.”

Hori-ko: “What is the meaning of this liquidation sale on death flags?”

Me: “Well, it might only be this way in my head, but this feels like as big a moment as Mikawa. So Horizon, I’ll give you a dream. I’ll take back everything that was taken from you and give you a dream. I’ll give you the same kind of dream as the rest of us.”

Hori-ko: “If I have all my emotions, I will have a dream?”

Me: “Judge. Then you can stand alongside us and my kingdom can finally begin. At the very least, my dream can’t begin without doing that.”

So...

Me: “The identity of my dream must lie beyond that.”

Listen.

Me: “Seijun, everyone, this is probably getting to be a lot of trouble, but I’ll be moving out ahead of you a little. So you get to following me and surpassing me. If you don’t, I’ll die pretty quickly. ...Got that?”

Everyone: “Judge!”

Me: “Oh. That’s good.”

Then...

Me: “Sorry, everyone. I’ll be going on ahead. And I’ll have something to say afterwards.”

“Hey, I know we’re in the middle of a meeting here, but could you listen for a second?”

Tenzou heard a voice within the icy atmosphere.

It was Toori. He crossed his arms and looked to Kagekatsu.

“Hey, you seem like a cool guy. Will you listen to what I have to say?”

Kagekatsu did not respond. He simply looked to his *sankt okno*. Instead, Saitou blatantly wrinkled his brow and took a step forward.

And just as Saitou prepared to speak, the *sankt okno* must have finished gathering the necessary information. Kagekatsu nodded and held out a hand to stop Saitou.

“Wait... We have gathered here for a meeting. Preventing him from speaking would be folly...”

“But Chancellor!”

“Do you intend to make me look a coward...? You must be as exhausted as

Naoe after heading out to battle... If necessary, I can provide you with plenty of my lightning attacks. How about it...?”

Saitou immediately bowed and stepped back. Kagekatsu laughed and looked toward the Musashi group again.

“Now, what do you wish to say, Musashi Chancellor...?”

“Oh, judge, judge. Looks like you’re surrounded by trouble too. I’ve been thinking lately, and being a king who keeps a nation running really is tough. For me, Seijun and the others do a lot of the work, but with you, it looks like a lot of the burden falls on you.”

Tenzou mentally nodded at Toori’s comment.

Russia’s leader Kagekatsu had also inherited the name of Ivan the Terrible, who was viewed as a tyrant. He did not hesitate to carry out purges, he had his own personal army, he would execute powerful people he did not like, and he had confiscated lot of private land as “national land”.

When his subordinates had betrayed him, he had been temporarily driven from the capital, but politics had gone poorly afterwards.

...So with the support of the commoners who only wanted stability, he reclaimed the throne.

This age required a powerful state. Even as a tyrant, everyone had obeyed and followed a leader who had forced them along to ensure their nation was not destroyed.

It was nearly the opposite of Musashi. The king made all decisions and corrected everything.

Tenzou did not know whether or not Toori knew this, but the boy could likely guess what kind of king Russia had based on the interactions with Naoe and Saitou. So...

“I have one thing to say. And I want the people who went to the other nations to listen up too.” Toori gave his usual smile as he opened his mouth. “I can’t do anything. But my friends can do anything. They’ll do anything for me. And they will end all war in the Far East. ...Seijun confirmed that earlier, right? So...”

So...

“We won’t use Musashi’s ability to fight for these negotiations. After all, we’re gonna win. If our victory is already assured, why use that for negotiations? Right? We won’t lose again. We’ve already decided that, so we don’t need to worry about any enemies.”

Listen.

“Seijun made her point pretty clearly, so I’ll make my point pretty clearly too.”

“And what is that?” asked Kagekatsu.

Musashi’s leader answered clearly.

“I won’t lose again.”

He gestured toward Tenzou and Mitotsudaira who stood in front of him.

“They won’t let me lose and I won’t let them lose. So Musashi will always be like that. No matter what might happen, Musashi will remain, Musashi will resist, and Musashi won’t give up. So what we’re about to do isn’t resisting.”

It was what came after resisting.

“We’re making a comeback.”

Mitotsudaira listened to her king.

“Listen. ...Let’s base all our upcoming talks on that assumption. If we don’t, I won’t understand what we’re talking about. Just like I trust myself...”

He turned toward her and the others.

“You all do the same.”

...Judge.

Mitotsudaira nodded at her king’s words. She felt this in her heart, so she nodded in her heart.

...Good.

How long had it been? How long had it been since her king had so clearly relied on and trusted in her? She knew what he would say if she asked him: “It’s

always been like that.”

And that was true. Otherwise, he would not have influenced her so much during middle school. But that had just been him telling her to follow him.

That was why he had taken the lead alone when he went to save Horizon at Mikawa.

He had relied on and trusted everyone, but he had gone ahead when descending from that bridge.

As if to say he did not want to get anyone else involved in something so dangerous...

...He did not call out to us.

He had almost certainly not understood what he was doing. He had known it was “doable” because Masazumi had told him so, but he had almost certainly not understood why he could do that as king. But...

“...”

Yes, realized Mitotsudaira. *That really was the beginning.*

She still remembered it.

She remembered the moment of running after him down the academy stairs as her king’s knight.

She remembered the instant when she had started truly answering her king who had showed such concern for her.

She remembered the situation in which even a king had cared so much for his companions that he had tried to keep his distance.

She remembered the moment when he had clearly made an enemy of the world.

And she remembered the instant when everyone had decided they had to follow him for that very reason.

...But he never said anything.

She had made a promise with him in middle school, but her decision to go help her king had been unrelated to that.

Her king could not do anything, so they had all decided to do everything they could to help him.

So when they had all decided they could not leave that king alone, he had likely understood that he would not be left alone and there was no need to be alone.

And now, he was finally aware of it.

After suffering a defeat and seeing the gloom hanging over everyone, he had grown aware of everything he had learned by moving out ahead.

There were probably all sorts of things he still did not understand about being a king, but that understanding had definitely begun.

When it came to helping people, waging war, and everything else, he had started down his own path as king. Mitotsudaira felt she had just heard that first footstep.

As long as her king remained a king, she would be his knight. So...

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira listened to her king speak the words that would once more pull everyone after him.

“Listen carefully, everyone.”

She listened.

“Let’s go conquer the world. Come at us, world. We won’t lose again. Keep that in mind when you face us.”

The idiot spoke to everyone from this closed space.

“Let’s go make our dreams come true, everyone.”

Masazumi realized her lips had loosened into a smile. ...*Oops*.

The situation surrounding her had just undergone a radical change.

She felt like the people and things behind them and next to them had all been

bound together.

It was support.

Someone was supporting them. Someone would always trust in and support them no matter what happened.

During Mikatagahara, she had let that support control her a little. He had said it was not like her. He had told her to enjoy it like normal.

She now realized just how right he had been. She wondered why she had been so worried back then.

The idiot supporting her was willing to smile at the world as he made it his enemy. He showed no fear even when facing people with far too much authority, military might, and personal ability.

What did she have to fear or worry about with that kind of idiot supporting her?

“...That’s right.”

That idiot was no longer worried about her. Not even with an idiotic sort of worry. And just like at Mikawa and England...

“We will pave the way no matter what might happen.”

This is what they call a royal road. Did you know that, idiot? And I’ll pave it for you. So...

Vice President: “Out of the way there. ...I’m moving out front.”

Me: “Oh, Seijun, are you feeling it now? ...Are you smiling?”

Vice President: “Let’s just say my expression is exactly what you’re imagining. And...”

Masazumi spoke.

Vice President: “Let’s resume the meeting.”

“As Musashi’s Vice President, I have something to tell the three nations.”

Masazumi inhaled and made a clear statement.

“We will accept the Date clan’s suggested basis for judging Musashi. We agree to not consider the Musashi’s battle ability in the coming negotiations.”

In Sendai Castle’s great hall, Katakura stood with the Committee Heads along the wall as he listened to Musashi’s ambassador speak.

She frequently paused to breathe and spoke slowly, but what she said was clear.

“Sh-she says...we will not...consider the Musashi’s...ability to...fight.”

She straightened up before continuing.

“It’s...a promise.”

Musashi had said they would not accept their own value in war as a topic for negotiation.

They’ve destroyed themselves, thought Katakura.

The ability to protect one’s own independence was a necessary part of being a nation. If they could not use that in this negotiation, they could not even be accepted as an independent nation.

They would be nothing more than a pacifist transport ship.

Then was there something else Musashi could do?

...It can’t be...

Once a possibility occurred to him, he looked to Musashi’s ambassador.

“————”

She was smiling.

She was smiling toward Masamune as if telling her to look forward to what was coming.

A moment later, a sign frame opened. It was from Musashi and it contained the words of their Vice President.

Vice President: “Musashi has a proposal.”

She showed how they would negotiate without relying on their ability to fight.

Vice President: “Date, Mogami, Sviet Rus, and the minor clans of Oushuu and Kantou. We will build a largescale neutral commerce city at Edo that will allow you all to trade freely. It will become an eastern trade hub for the entire Far East.”

And...

Vice President: “To earn the friendship and cooperation of Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus, Musashi will construct a land route with land ports that will act as way stations for the three nations. Oushuu and Sviet Rus will be commercially unified and you will have a secure air and land route. Through largescale and constant travel to and from Edo, you can buy or sell resources and products, and your range of distribution will spread to any nation capable of reaching Edo. That commercial distribution will involve various fees such as those for transportation, but the Far East will not apply any tariffs that are not part of the history recreation. Meaning...”

Meaning...

Vice President: “Oushuu and Sviet Rus were said to have formed a single community during the Age of Dawn. We propose reviving that peaceful community around commerce and cultural exchange. And this is unrelated to anyone’s ability to fight, so it can be implemented quickly. After all, this would be impossible without the cooperation of all three nations and it must be acted on immediately if it is a reaction to the world’s upcoming actions.”

“I see...”

Yoshiaki covered her mouth with her fan as she spoke.

“So Musashi’s Vice President is telling us we are not to side with Hashiba, but we need not side with Musashi either. ...We are to side with our own futures and act on it now.”

Interesting, thought Yoshiaki. One common factor shared by Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date was poor trade power. That was partially due to their long and cold winters, but it was also due to the Far East’s central mountain ranges obstructing travel.

All three nations had open sea routes, but that required passing through other nations' territorial waters, which meant paying tolls and going through inspections, so they did not do so often.

But Musashi was different.

They also had to pay tolls and undergo inspections, but they could transport far more. And due to travelling between so many nations, their international trade goods were less strictly inspected in order to avoid trouble between nations.

"But...if you build a trade base at Edo...where are you planning to go next?"

Hearing that question, Yoshiyasu opened a sign frame, typed on the keyboard, and responded after a few seconds.

"According to the Treasurer's suggestion, IZUMO, Sakai, Hirado, and – if possible – Mikawa... What do you think about that?"

"They're focusing a lot on the history recreation. But it is not a bad idea. After all, narrowing their bases down to those few will shorten the distance of Musashi's travels and increase the frequency of trade."

Meaning...

"Musashi is offering us trade with the entire Far East. They will build a major commerce route and urge us to take part as a single northern community. The entire Far East will profit as long as Musashi remains in the air, but even if we do not cooperate, Musashi will likely bring this same deal to the other nations. If that happens, we will fall behind the rest of the Far East on the economic front..."

Their lack of military might did not matter here.

This is a politician's idea, thought Yoshiaki as she considered the Musashi Vice President's plan. *A merchant would not come up with this plan based on their own calculations.*

After all, developing the land route would require a massive investment of money, personnel, and time.

But it was well worth that investment.

“Matsudaira owns Edo, so if it becomes a base of commerce, they will always have a means of trading with our three nations and the other nations. ...They will make back their initial investment in no time at all. And they can likely add to their business plan by using that recovered money as collateral...”

This plan had been built up by the Musashi Vice President, but something else had built the foundation.

...Their discussion with Hiraizumi's Yasuhira...

They were suggesting a revival of Oushuu and Sviet Rus's community from the Age of Dawn. But if Musashi built the transportation routes and the land ports to act as way points, it would no longer be a community of just Oushuu and Sviet Rus.

...Musashi Vice President...

After accepting the conflict from the Age of Dawn, was she still attempting to create a great community that encompassed the entire Far East?

And had she chosen to begin with the land that had once resisted and never let go of that resistance?

“Heh...”

“Is she being naïve?”

Yoshiyasu had hit the bulls-eye, so Yoshiaki could only nod.

“That idealistic vision is so very naïve, but that is exactly what makes it so attractive.”

“Eh? That mean it's actually a bad idea, doesn't it?”

Hearing the vassal's question, Shakenobe tilted his entire body.

“Is it a bad idea, mon? Would it never work, mon? Sometimes I feel like swimming in another river, mon. But is that a bad idea, mon?”

“I end up being far too kind with you around, Shakenobe.”

But there was something Yoshiaki had to say.

“That plan will not last long. It is a pipe dream. ...Satomi, you understand, don't you?”

“Do you mean Mogami losing its status as a clan? Or Sviet Rus’s territorial reduction after Sekigahara?”

“I mean both. Talk all you want about a northern community to be created here, but by the time that happens, Mogami will have nearly vanished and Sviet Rus will have lost its strength. Only Date will remain. Only Date will survive by preserving enough national strength to be called the rulers of Oushuu, so only they will benefit from this community.”

So...

“I cannot agree to this community idea. The same will go for Sviet Rus. And Sviet Rus should make a much more obvious display of their opposition.”

“Eh? A much more obvious display of their opposition? What do you mean?”

This vassal was a nice person, so Yoshiaki decided to answer her kindly. She pulled a rice snack from her sleeve, handed it to the vassal, and waited until the girl had started munching on it.

“Are you listening? Sviet Rus is facing your Chancellor’s group.”

So Sviet Rus would adopt a certain method.

“Hos – ta – ges.”

“Don’t think too badly of us. This is only the natural response for a negotiation between nations.”

Mitotsudaira took a defensive stance and saw Shigenaga place a hand on the sword at her hip.

Sviet Rus warriors had just left the left and right hallways to surround them. It was a triple ring of demons.

Some even targeted them from the vents near the hall’s ceiling. The staffs held by the shelled figures were the hexagonal focusers unique to the Russian spell factory of Umnyi Vedma.

The warriors would fire some initial shots from above, they would face up to defend against it, and the rest of the soldiers would use that opening to rush in

from the sides. It was an obvious but effective strategy.

“Musashi group,” said Shigenaga. “This space has limited entrances. You will find nothing even if you break through the walls. We hold the exits, so you have nowhere to run. So...”

“So we should stop holding a meeting that won’t benefit Sviet Rus?”

“Testament. That is correct. ...The community your Vice President suggested holds no future benefit for us. Musashi is simply holding some delicious-looking bait just out of reach in order to gain our immediate cooperation. ...Am I wrong?”

Someone nodded. It was Saitou who stood at the front of the dais to protect Kagekatsu. His arms hung relaxed at his side and he held his hands somewhat opened.

“Musashi’s Chancellor and President as well as the Logismoï Oplo princess should make excellent hostages. It will also give us influence over the other two nations.”

“Don’t you find this to be underhanded?”

“The victors write history and decide what is justified. That is exactly what Shinto did during the Age of Dawn.”

Shigenaga responded to Saitou’s words by lowering her body. She was not targeting Mitotsudaira; she was targeting the king behind Mitotsudaira.

So Mitotsudaira took a step forward. If anyone was going to treat her king rudely, it was a knight’s duty to be his shield and his sword. The surrounding demons deepened their combat stances, but Mitotsudaira felt no fear in her heart. After all...

“Hey, you guys surrounding us? You need to be careful.”

She heard her king’s voice behind her.

“My first knight here held her own against the Reine des Garous in a one-on-one fight.”

“M-my king, do you have to compliment me in such weird ways...?”

“I do. And when she climbs up to high places, she gets real excited, starts singing ‘lu lu la la’, and does some crazy stuff.”

“That really is weird and it isn’t even a compliment!!”

...Ah, the demons look a little disturbed!

In a way, this may have been the right thing to do, she realized.

“I really think you should stop this,” said someone else. “...But what do you think?”

It was Mary.

Mary finally understood why Masazumi had placed her in this group.

“I am Mary Stuart, currently exiled to Musashi where I am helping the Chancellor’s Officers.”

She inhaled and gently tensed her chest.

“According to the Testament descriptions, Ivan IV viewed England as a possible destination if he had to flee Russia and the two nations engaged in trade. The nations around Russia even sent England a letter asking them to cease trade with Russia, and Ivan IV once asked to marry one of the Fairy Queen’s maids but was rejected because the Fairy Queen ‘could not bear to send her somewhere so cold’. ...That is apparently the relationship between our two nations.”

Her meaning had to have gotten through to them.

And Saitou proved it as he stood in front of the dais.

“So you are the mother of England’s heir...”

“Judge. ...The father is here too.”

Just in case, she did not restrict his movements by taking his hand. Instead she held her hand out toward him but not enough to reach him.

...Nn.

But he reached out and grabbed her hand anyway.

“————”

She sensed why in his stronger than normal grip and she wondered if it was wrong that that made her feel happy. But instead of escorting her, he intertwined their fingers so as not to let go.

“Well done,” he said so only she could hear. “It is because of that identity and history that we were able to meet and arrive where we are. And since you are able to use that properly...”

He squeezed her hand even harder.

“I can feel proud that you came to me and showed me the future, Mary-dono.”

“...Thank you very much.”

That was true. Just a few months earlier, Mary never would have thought of “using” her name. But now she felt no aversion to doing so and she wanted to use her presence to save her current home. This was due to how she felt about arriving at Musashi, experiencing so much there, and being taken better care of than ever before.

...I appreciate all of it.

Nothing made her happier than being able to have someone openly call her “Mary-dono”.

So she wanted to protect the person who did so and the place where they lived. And...

“Please remember that England is watching Sviet Rus.”

“Then...”

Saitou moved. He raised his right hand to have the surrounding demons move back, but then he spoke.

“Stand back, future of England. Do so and we will not touch you. I would also like for you to not assist them with Excalibur. ...This is Russia’s way of showing our friendship with England.”

After saying that, he audibly descended a step.

At that moment, a burst of motion exploded in front of him. Shigenaga kicked off the dais's bottom step to accelerate forward while holding her sword low.

Chapter 73: Roarer on the Starting Line

第七十三章

『スタートラインの咆吼者』



心が叫ぶとき
世界は変わるとも
配点（最前線）

When your heart cries out

The world will change

Point Allocation (Front Line)

Mitotsudaira did not panic when Shigenaga approached with the speed of a demon. She simply took a step forward while speaking.

“My king. ...Feel free to move forward.”

“Judge. ...I’m counting on you.”

Her king cheerfully walked forward and Mitotsudaira moved as the wind to guide him.

She saw Shigenaga’s sword pointed straight down in front of her. Shigenaga was preparing to swing the sword up to slice Mitotsudaira’s king from the crotch to the top of his head. It also allowed her to use the blade as a shield. And if Mitotsudaira carelessly charged in, she would get cut herself. So...

“———”

Mitotsudaira did not hesitate to move right in.

Shigenaga saw the silver wolf’s speed.

The girl was fast but too straightforward. She was right in the center of Shigenaga’s vision.

She was coming.

Instead of keeping her body low, the wolf used a high-speed leap that was much like a light step.

She raised her left knee, so she likely intended to slip the knee past Shigenaga’s raised sword and either knee or kick her.

“...That won’t work!”

Shigenaga turned to the side to hide her body behind the sword and took a

stance that allowed her to push the blade forward with her entire body.

She placed the downward-pointing blade in front of the wolf and prepared to push it forward.

“Take this...!”

She shoved it forward. And in that instant, a certain color spread out before her eyes.

...Silver!?

By the time she realized it was hair, something else had joined the scene.

It was the wolf’s speed.

From the very first movement, she understood what had happened. The silver wolf had dropped down her raised knee, shin, and foot to kick off the floor and then swung her other leg behind her with blinding speed.

“A front flip leading into a heel kick!?”

Mitotsudaira’s flipping heel kick had the double acceleration of the left leg she had dropped down from above and the right leg she had swung up behind her.

Shigenaga had expected her to make a high-speed approach, so her eyes could not keep up with the wolf’s motion as she flew high into the air. The swinging and scattering hair did not help matters there.

But Shigenaga did not hesitate. She had to fulfill her duty no matter what attack she was exposed to.

“Ohhh...”

She raised and pushed her blade straight forward.

That settled it.

After the swift flip, the silver wolf’s right heel accurately struck something.

It was the pommel of the hilt Shigenaga held high. The shoe heel that dropped down like an axe slammed the pommel down with a metallic clang.

As a result, the tip of Shigenaga's blade stabbed deep into the floor.

The blade pierced about twenty centimeters into the floor below the red carpet.

The silver wolf landed with one foot on the pommel. Her other leg retained the momentum of her flip, so she took the stance of someone preparing to kick a ball.

"Now, then!"

A moment later, Shigenaga fell back. No, she was forced to fall back.

After stomping the sword down with her right leg, the silver wolf brought back the left leg that had swung behind her and kicked Shigenaga in the center of the gut.

The blow audibly landed and Shigenaga doubled over and flew backwards. She held her stomach with her right hand, bared her demon fangs, and took a deep breath.

The wolf used the force of the kick to make a midair backflip.

When the wolf landed, Shigenaga took a defensive stance.

Another burst of silver speed soon followed. The wolf swung her body to the left and right while instantly filling the gap between her and Shigenaga. She must have noticed Shigenaga's defensive stance because...

"...!"

The wolf kicked at the sword stabbed in the ground to swiftly change her angle of attack. She leaped toward Shigenaga's right side.

The silver wolf raised her right leg to settle this with a kick. She did not use a blade. This space was meant for their meeting, not for killing.

"That is my pride as a knight of Musashi!"

At that moment, the silver wolf saw something beyond the arm on Shigenaga's stomach.

"The Honjou Shield!?"

A small ether shield protected Shigenaga from within her disturbed clothing.

The silver wolf's previous kick had done no damage to Shigenaga. Doubling over and taking a deep breath had been a bluff. She was willing to do whatever it took to win and she thrust her right arm forward as if to prove it.

"Honjou Shield...!!"

Three layers of large shields over three meters tall slammed into the silver wolf from the front of the demon's mid-level punch.

Mitotsudaira switched to a new way of thinking.

This was not a place for killing, but she needed to eliminate the barrier before her.

...A blade!!

She quickly swung her left arm behind her and grabbed something with her silver chains.

It was the sword stabbed into the floor. She pulled it out with her silver chains. She was lucky she had loosened it by kicking it to change direction earlier. It pulled out and flew to her hand, but...

"Fly!"

She did not hold onto it. She grabbed it and the chain with her fingers, swung it like a metal ring, and let go with a snap of the wrist.

The tip of the sword shot through the air. In the blink of an eye, she could hear it tearing through the air and colliding with the shield.

One layer shattered and she stepped forward as it reached the second.

"...!!"

That too shattered, but the blade broke along with it. In an instant, the tempered blade swelled out like a pea pod, the plain metal inside split, and cracks ran through the blade.

"————"

Followed by the sound of splitting air, the blade shattered, starting from the tip.

The metal shards turned to dust and scattered through the air. But one shield remained and it had been thrown toward Mitotsudaira.

“...I will be passing through.”

She gathered a bit of strength in her right leg and made a full-body dash forward.

She counterattacked with a piercing heel kick which shattered the ether shield down the center. She had jabbed with the heel pick she normally used to anchor herself while throwing heavy objects with the silver chains. The pick instantly shot out at the exact moment of her kick and pierced the large shield.

Shigenaga stood beyond the destroyed ether light.

She no longer had a weapon and it was unlikely she could prepare another Honjou Shield so quickly. So Mitotsudaira swung her right foot down and to the left while spinning and bending her body like a whip.

...A left leg savate technique!

She spun around.

Her left leg quickly passed behind her and she aimed for Shigenaga's chest with the heel.

At that moment, a shadow arrived from above. More accurately, it arrived from beyond Shigenaga. As Shigenaga took a protective stance, someone made a low and heavy leap over her head.

“Saitou Tomonobu...!”

Shigenaga had sensed the optimal opportunity.

Her three-layer Honjou Shield had not just been for defense. It had also been to hide Saitou's attack from behind her.

She had predicted the sword would break, but she had not expected the wolf to break the third shield. The plan had been for the silver wolf to collide with

the second or third shield, lose her balance, and be hit by Saitou's attack.

However, the wolf had broken even the third shield and her kick was about to reach Shigenaga.

But that was all. It was true she had noticed Saitou earlier than she should have, but there was nothing she could do while performing her savate rotation.

Or so Shigenaga thought.

"...Black!?"

A color charged her way from the left.

It was located at the end of the silver chain being swung by the spinning silver wolf. Something flew in an arc from behind her. It was mostly black, but it had white armor.

"The Logismoi Oplo – Lype Katathlipse...!"

Beyond the wolf's fluttering hair, Shigenaga saw Musashi's princess sipping at a teacup she had pulled from somewhere.

...This is...

There was no point in asking when they had set this up. Why had the wolf rushed straight in? Why had she used a heel kick that swung her hair around? Why had she used a feint that swung her body to the left and right? And why had she repeatedly kicked straight ahead, forcing Shigenaga to fall back?

It had all been to hide what was behind her and keep Shigenaga's eyes on her.

She had set this up, but she would not have used it had it not been necessary. But Saitou's appearance had made it necessary.

The giant sword flew in from the right as a chain hammer. It was on a direct course for Saitou in the air, so Shigenaga released her left arm's defensive position and thrust that palm into the air on her left.

"Honjou Shield...!"

Mitotsudaira pulled on her silver chain to accelerate. Lype Katathlipse swung forward and collided with the new Honjou Shield.

This one also had three layers, but the gunblade had plenty of speed and easily shattered all three solid barriers of light.

The shattering sound had the color of light. But that altered Lype Katathlipse's trajectory. The black and white sword bounced and spun as it flew over Shigenaga's head.

Then Mitotsudaira looked to Shigenaga's face.

The demon was smiling. Her eyebrows were raised and she forced a smile while glaring at Mitotsudaira.

"Saitou...!"

She had chosen to take the kick Mitotsudaira was sending her way. She would protect Saitou and give him a chance to attack. That was what her smile meant. But...

...Too bad!

Mitotsudaira swung her arm and pulled back on the silver chain swinging Lype Katathlipse through the air.

"Forward!"

Mitotsudaira was hanging in the air while still in her savate stance. By pulling on the silver chain while airborne, she pulled her body forward rather than pulling Lype Katathlipse back.

So she used that.

She threw herself forward and toward Lype Katathlipse.

She slipped below Saitou's falling path and approached Shigenaga's chest. Lype Katathlipse passed between her and Saitou as he passed by overhead. All that remained was Shigenaga beyond the scattering ether light and Mitotsudaira as she made her kick.

Mitotsudaira accelerated her entire body while making her kick. But...

"...!?"

Shigenaga suddenly grew more distant.

All of a sudden, she was outside the reach of Mitotsudaira's kick.

It was obvious why: Saitou had changed his position in midair.

“We can’t have that.”

When he should have been passing by over Mitotsudaira’s head, he forcibly stretched out. This extended his legs down where he kicked at Shigenaga’s shoulders.

That allowed him to jump forward and it pushed Shigenaga away from Mitotsudaira’s attack.

Mitotsudaira held Lype Katathlipse in her arms as her attack missed and she landed. At about the same time, Shigenaga lowered her hips in a defensive stance and Saitou landed while gently lowering his own stance.

None of them questioned the series of events.

After all, they either looked back or looked up toward the dais containing Kagekatsu’s throne.

“Hey, I’ll be interrupting for a moment. That okay?”

Musashi’s Chancellor stood in front of Kagekatsu.

He had arrived. Everything was in place for Musashi’s representative to speak directly with Sviet Rus’s representative.

Shigenaga watched Saitou’s shoulders tense beyond the silver wolf.

“Saitou...why? Your Zhong Kui spell is crying!”

“Testament. I apologize, but to be honest, I am quite old. Even if a Zhong Kui can read several steps ahead...” Saitou smiled bitterly. “I am afraid to ‘read’ the coming battle if we are missing you.”

Shigenaga saw the silver wolf move after hearing that. She quickly moved Lype Katathlipse from her left hand to her right, faced the dais behind Shigenaga, and got down on one knee.

Saitou also faced the dais and got down on one knee.

Shigenaga did not even need to see what was happening on the dais behind her.

...Kagekatsu...

When she did look back and to the top of the dais, she sensed danger.

Kagekatsu stood up as Musashi's Chancellor arrived in front of his throne.

They faced each other from less than a meter away.

One was known as "Mr. Impossible" and the other was known as "The Terrible".

...I hope he'll be okay.

Kagekatsu was a demon king who was not cut out to be a king.

In his heart, Kagekatsu was about to cry.

What was he supposed to do?

He had to speak with Musashi's representative with no one else nearby.

He did not want to. He wanted to run away and leave this place. If he did that, no one would call him here ever again and perhaps he would even lose his inherited names.

He felt more fear than pain.

...Why?

Why was it?

...Why was I left in charge of such an important part of the world?

Many lives depended on him. Why had something so dangerous been left with a single person?

He knew the answer: his family and his ability. The trends at the time when he had inherited his names were also a factor. But...

"Musashi Chancellor..."

What about the boy standing before him? His question suddenly escaped his

lips.

“Why are you here...?”

Musashi's Chancellor immediately answered that question he wanted answered.

“I'm not here.” The boy smiled cheerfully. “This is just a point along the way. Right?”

He slapped Kagekatsu's shoulder. He showed no fear and put no real strength into it. The audible slap was the same kind exchanged between old friends.

“It's the same for you, right? You stood up instead of staying seated. There's somewhere you want to go, isn't there? If you can't go there, just tell me. I'll take on that impossibility too and stop by there. Where do you want to go? What do you want to do? What do you want to think? I don't know my own answers yet, but if you know yours, then tell me.”

Also...

“Tell me what it is you like.”

Kagekatsu was unsure whether or not he should say anything.

...What I like...?”

He knew the answer was not war, conflict between nations, or political plotting. He had the power to alter other people's destinies, but he was hesitant to wield that power.

But there was one thing he wanted to ask because he had that power.

“Do you not fear me...?”

He was a tyrant known as “The Terrible”. He was the embodiment of the power known as king. He had all the abilities of those who served him.

“Do you not fear the view of me you hold inside yourself...?”

“If I feared you and tried to die, no one would let it happen,” the boy answered with a smile. “It's the same for you, right? There are times when things are just too much of a pain in the ass and you want to just give up, right?”

Right? Please tell me you have times like that. ...But, well, the people around you won't let you do that."

After all...

"If something is a real pain in the ass, that means it's a problem but also something you can't just ignore. So someone like you who really understands his own power would be the ideal person to handle it."

"...The ideal person!?"

Kagekatsu accidentally raised his voice. It was enough to reverberate through the hall and make everyone flinch. It was enough for even Saitou to look up toward him.

...This is not good.

That roar had been fear and anger directed at himself.

He had wanted to run away from all this, but now this boy said he was the ideal person for it.

...It almost sounds like he is trying to trick me into taking on the role...

He was afraid he would have his escape route cut off by some clever words. And to avoid that...

"A mere human thinks he can judge Ivan the Terrible's power...!?"

He felt the hall brighten. He emitted ether from his entire body as lightning.

...Yes.

This should return everything to normal once again, thought Kagekatsu.

He asked if I had something I wanted to do.

But there is much I cannot do as a king and I quite like that.

And I have my own restrictions. I have long been restricted by my path as "The Terrible".

"Musashi Chancellor...!"

I may have been able to join you if I had more courage, selfishness, optimism, callousness, or whatever else. But...

“I am the king of Sviet Rus...!”

“But you seem to like botanical gardens and zoos.”

With a smile, the boy looked to the sign frame next to him. It displayed a Sviet Rus site.

“What’s wrong with using your power in little ways like this?”

Tenzou felt like the hall had grown dark.

Except it had not. Ivan the Terrible’s lightning had settled down. The bluish-white light which had shot out like a hook instead gently surrounded him. Almost like...

“A saint’s halo...”

Tenzou nodded at Mary’s comment.

...What does this mean?

He did not know. But ever since Mitotsudaira had begun her explosion of destruction, he had gathered all the latest Sviet Rus information about Kagekatsu, arranged it so even the idiot could understand, and then sent it out.

The very latest information had been uploaded to the Sviet Rus site they had been shown before the meeting.

The king had decided to add to the botanical garden and zoo as a form of welfare for the children.

It did seem very unlike someone known as “The Terrible”, but...

Novice: “According to the Testament descriptions, Ivan the Terrible was a tyrant who ruled with an iron fist and regularly purged or executed anyone he didn’t like. He beat to death an heir who earned his wrath and that brought a period of political instability to Russia. However, he was devoutly religious, so he protected the activities of the church and always made sure to say his prayers. In his last years, he repented and apologized for all the people he killed. There are a lot of interpretations of that, but my love of romance leads me to one interpretation in particular.”

That being...

Novice: “He was quick to anger, but he repented and prayed...because he understood that he was a tyrant.”

Smoking Girl: “That sounds like it would drive you insane. ...He was in a frigid land that required a powerful state and he was aware he let his anger get the better of him, but he continued on as king.”

Novice: “He prayed to god and repented in the hopes that the deaths of the rebels would lead to the development of the nation. ...Personally, I think that way of thinking is a lot like our idea of purification. This might be naïve of me, but my romantic side asks who Ivan the Terrible really was. ...If he was not truly a king, then he was a short-tempered but stubborn believer. He had to have prayed for the people while trying to figure out how to restrain himself and improve his surroundings.”

“You say a lot of cool things, but you like to take a break for gardening and to look after the animals, don’t you?”

Kagekatsu’s heart pounded in his chest when the truth was suddenly presented to him like this. To secure his position here, he opened his mouth before his subordinates could.

“Do not be ridiculous...! That is standard welfare! I am merely displaying the king’s kindness to earn the people’s support...!”

“Nah, I bet you’re always thinking, ‘Oh, bunny! You’re so cute, bunny~ Ah, don’t run away, fluffy bunny!’ ”

Musashi’s Chancellor made some gestures to match, but Kagekatsu could only respond in one way.

...I do think that! I’m sorryyyyyyyy!!

“Also.” The boy acted like he could see something on the floor. “ ‘Wow, the flowers are finally starting to bud! This bed is going to look amazing once they all bloom. But it would be a shame to thin them out, so I’ll share some with the children.’ ...You think that too, don’t you?”

It's true, he thought just before hearing a voice from below the dais. It was Saitou. The man was kneeling and bowing his head, so spoke loudly toward the floor.

"You dare make a mockery of a nation's king, King of Musashi!?"

"That's not what I'm doing, you moron. I'm a king too, so I'm just chatting. If this counted as mocking, Musashi'd be in some real trouble. Besides...this is gonna be the world standard in the future."

"Ho ho? In that case, I shall stop holding back when I speak."

"Wait, Horizon. You mean you were holding back before...?"

Musashi's leader briefly lost focus, but he soon took a breath and slapped Kagekatsu's shoulder again.

"This means that's your impossibility. You want to play in the garden and frolic with the animals, but it'd hurt your reputation as a...tire-rut?"

Shigenaga quietly corrected him from below the dais.

"Tyrant."

"Yeah, that's what I meant. That. You do a lot of executions and stuff, right? And you pray to god, right? If that's keeping you from doing what you want, then...yeah, I'll go apologize with you. And once the whole tyrant thing is gone, you can go mess around in the garden and raise a rabbit."

...Utter nonsense...

He would love more than anything to do that, but it was no longer possible.

"I cannot do that. ...I cannot escape the title of tyrant."

"Huh? Why's that?"

"Testament." Kagekatsu nodded. "Novgorod."

Kagekatsu spoke.

"I am Ivan IV. According to the Testament descriptions...the trade city of Novgorod was growing more independent and attempting to create

connections with other nations. To reclaim control, I declared war on the disobedient city. Novgorod was nearly destroyed and the city was purged until 3/4 of its sixty thousand people were lost.”

He sighed.

“This was done eight years ago and it doubled as an early recreation of the Kagetora Incident which became an inheritance issue for Uesugi. Nagao Kagetora fought me, Kagekatsu, and was driven to suicide. ...Novgorod Mayoress Marfa had inherited that name, but as an interpretation of the Testament descriptions, she was purged for both incidents at once. Do you understand?” asked Kagekatsu. “Marfa is the immortal type of demon. Her body will never vanish until it is naturally destroyed and it can be repaired. So she told me to leave it all to her. In our discussions, it was decided she would be ‘killed’ as a ‘representative of the city’. That should have been all it was. But...”

But...

“When word reached me, it turned out every life under Marfa’s command committed suicide.”

Kagekatsu remembered it well.

He had received a report saying that even Marfa had almost entirely smashed her own body and remade it.

All the people of Novgorod had died and Marfa had remade the people’s bodies.

She had used spells to move some corpses and to process other corpses. Most of them had been sewn together with four people’s remains forming a single body so that “only 1/4 of the population survived”.

...And most of their souls did not remain...

Marfa had effectively been alone. The lingering regret would occasionally manifest as a ghost, but that was nothing more than replaying the past and not enough for her to speak with.

He did not know why she had done that.

But he knew his destiny had taken everything from her and left her all alone.
And it was more than just her. He had erased everything around her.
The day he had received that report was the day he had decided everything.
He had feigned illness in his bed, he had been unable to sleep, and he had simply thought.

...I must become a tyrant.

He did not know why he had become a king, but he had known then that he could not become the good king he had wanted to be. So...

"I am...the tyrant who took every last life in a city."

"I see."

The boy nodded in front of him and then forcefully slapped his shoulder.

"That settles it then. Tell me when you've got some free time. ...Let's go to Novgorod together and apologize."

"Why!?"

The demon roared and the human answered.

"Because I need your power."

"You need a tyrant's power!?"

"You're really strong and cool, ain'tcha? So let's go sweep away the sad part of that. If you have to be a tyrant, then you can only cry in your heart like when you adore the flowers or bunnies."

"———"

"Listen," the idiot said to the tyrant. "If you've taken something from someone, I'll take it back for them. It's the same for everyone else. I'll take back everything that's been lost, that's gone away, or that's been forgotten. It might take a long time and it might not be in the same form it was originally..."

He smiled.

"But, well, I don't have that much power, I guess? Yeah, that's it. So lend me

some power. What's wrong with being a tyrant? With you helping out, we can get things done way quicker!"

Kagekatsu was at a loss for words as he was slapped on the shoulder again and again.

...This boy...

He had cheerfully rejected and cheerfully accepted every part of Kagekatsu.

...Will he actually trust in me?

No matter how much he rejected Kagekatsu's power and desires, he would trust him.

He was willing to go with him. So Kagekatsu wanted to say something. But he could not form the words.

"..."

Musashi's Chancellor gave an extra powerful slap of his shoulder. And...

"Return to your position, Musashi Chancellor...!"

Kagekatsu was unable to speak his heart, yet he had to hold down the raging feelings threatening to escape from his mouth.

"If you are willing to support my Sviet Rus to that extent, I am willing to hear you out. Let us discuss how you intend to include Sviet Rus – and its future reduction of territory – in your northern community...!"

"I too am interested in that." Yoshiaki got up and spoke into her sign frame. "Let us hear it. ...Mogami will lose its status as a clan due to our lack of an heir, so how will you include us in your northern community? Depending on your answer, I might just declare it inadequate and turn against Musashi."

She glanced toward the vassal and the Satomi President before lifting the corners of her mouth. She smoothly held her fan out forward.

"Can you see this?"

The festival was approaching its climax. The festival music primarily played by large drums, the in and out movements of the dancing circles of people, and the voices from the festival stands were all growing.

Yoshiaki waved the fan to indicate it all, including the original site of Novgorod.

“How do you intend to treat all these people?”

Her question received an immediate answer.

Vice President: “I know exactly what we will do about Sviet Rus’s reduced territory and Mogami’s loss of clanhood.”

Musashi’s Vice President stated her conclusion.

Vice President: “We will accurately carry out those Testament descriptions. ... Obeying the Testament remains Musashi’s standard policy.”

“Then...!” shouted Saitou from the hall acting as Sviet Rus’s meeting room. “You intend to take everything from Sviet Rus!?”

Vice President: “Tell me why you think that.”

“The development of the outside world!”

Saitou swung his right hand to open a two meter *sankt okno*. Instead of the Far East, it displayed a map of the entire world.

“Musashi claims it will work to develop the outer world! Even if the Uesugi clan of Jouetsu loses its territory, Sviet Rus should be able to rule from Jouetsu and into Kantou using Russia’s history recreation! But if you begin developing the outside world, we will be forced to abandon our stable rule of Jouetsu and Kantou as Russia and instead head into the outside world!”

That is their scheme, thought Saitou. The Far Eastern land abandoned thanks to the Testament descriptions will be divided up between their clans to give Matsudaira control of it all. And they will do the same to Mogami.

“You will find a reason to confiscate land or clanhood to gradually take up the Far East’s land and increase Matsudaira’s power! How can we assume anything

else!?”

Vice President: “I agree that removing the provisional rule that way would be in line with the history recreation.”

“So,” said the Musashi Vice President.

Vice President: “I have a suggestion here. Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date...is there any chance you could bind even stronger national bonds with Musashi?”

“Even stronger...?”

Saitou questioned that and the Musashi Vice President responded with the word “judge”.

Vice President: “After Matsudaira’s rule of the Far East begins, it will confiscate most of the other nations’ territory. That is a path to centralized power which was used by both England and Russia. But the Far East is a large place and the Musashi must travel to and from its bases to trade. So...”

After pausing for a breath, she continued with the next breath.

Vice President: “We will place Mogami, Date, and Sviet Rus’s Uesugi in charge of managing Matsudaira’s northern land.”

Masazumi stood on the nighttime bridge and viewed the festival below.

“That managed land will pay taxes to Matsudaira on a yearly basis, whether at a fixed or variable rate. Your managed territory, the extent of your privileges, the regional taxes, and other details will be set through discussions with Matsudaira after Sekigahara, but let us treat your previous territories as the standard for that territory.”

Tomo-no-Bu: “And if we do not develop the outside world...?”

“In that case, the land you would have received will be taken by the other nations. ...Matsudaira can only make decisions for the Far East, not for the outside world. And if the other nations make progress in developing the outside world while you do not...”

Masazumi took a breath.

“The Testament Union will strip you of your status as Russia.”

Tomo-no-Bu: “Oh...?”

Don't let that surprise you. There's more to come.

“Listen. This will be implemented after Westphalia. Please understand that the Far East and Musashi's influence will have grown considerably by then.”

Tomo-no-Bu: “In other words, if we build our strength and rebel...we will be attacked by the Testament Union and the other nations?”

“If you do so in the Far East, yes. After all, the Far East will have peace.”

Masazumi inhaled.

“But the outside world's history is another matter. So if you want to pick a fight with the Far East or Matsudaira, do so from the outside world. If such a history exists between the Far East and the original Russia, then we will respond appropriately. ...We will take you on whenever you want.”

“I see...”

Saitou thought about the Musashi Vice President's proposition.

...Could Uesugi remain in control of Sviet Rus's land?

Currently, Sviet Rus had stable domestic productivity, but the cold land and the terrain prevented them from using that productivity for trade. That was a standard problem for northern nations.

What would happen if they could solve that all at once?

“Is it just me or does the phrase ‘big success’ seem really dirty since it sounds a lot like ‘big suck-sex’!?”

Be quiet, Musashi Chancellor.

Regardless, Saitou thought this was a good opportunity to make a dramatic change in their rule over this icy land. They would never get another chance to fulfill their history recreation together with the rest of the three nations.

Of course, that change would require developing the outside world.

It would not bring total peace. And...

KageV: “Our managed territory would be based on discussions after Sekigahara? ...That is an interesting idea.”

Saitou mentally nodded at what Kagekatsu had realized.

Tomo-no-Bu: “Matsudaira is telling us to ignore Hashiba and come to Sekigahara with the greatest territory we can manage. ...And of course, that is not entirely dependent on war. We must quickly cultivate the uncertain parts of our borders and build villages there. If Date and Mogami do the same, we will end up with adjacent villages. But that is another type of a territorial war. The type named prosperity.”

KageV: “Yes, that is nice. I like the sound of that.”

Kagekatsu continued speaking.

KageV: “That is a war I could love. I could stand in the lead and the people could follow like they were making a pilgrimage. We could clear the land, control the weather, summon water, produce fire, calm the anxious nights with hymns, and call in thunder as the seasons changed.”

And...

KageV: “On the borders of the greatest territory I could create, we could plant flowers to show off Sviet Rus’s prosperity to the other nations.”

“———”

Saitou gasped.

This was likely the first time he had heard this from the demon leader they had lifted up as their king. No, it was definitely the first time that king had described the kingdom he wanted instead of the kingdom he felt others or history wanted.

It had taken until Sviet Rus was losing its shape and beginning to change, but...

Tomo-no-Bu: “...We made it in time.”

KageV: “Made what in time?”

Saitou could not immediately answer. Their job was to make this king even more kingly in the future. That mindset had only just begun to set in, so Saitou did not want to carelessly alter it or prematurely fix it in place.

There was only one thing he had to say now.

Tomo-no-Bu: “Chancellor Kagekatsu the Terrible...your retainers, Council Heads, and nobles are here to support your desires.”

“Testament,” said Kagekatsu with a nod.

That settled it. There were still some problems left and they would have to solve them quickly, but this settled it.

Sviet Rus had decided where it was going. After all, their king had seen the kingdom he wanted. So there was no meaning for them to oppose their tyrant.

Tomo-no-Bu: “Council Heads, use every means available to find methods of securing as much territory as possible before Sekigahara. If any can be immediately implemented, submit them for approval.”

After a series of “testament” responses, a few of the Council Heads bowed and left the meeting room.

It had begun.

They had made their decision and gotten started. They could not step back or come to a stop anymore. But...

Nine-Tail Girl: “You seem to be having fun, Sviet Rus. ...Is that Kagekatsu boy in the best mood he’s been in for years?”

It was Mogami. Mogami Yoshiaki. She laughed through the text of her divine transmission.

Nine-Tail Girl: “As a northern community, the three nations will manage Matsudaira’s land. As long as we pay taxes, we are effectively free to do whatever we wish and we will even receive initial infrastructure support. Those are some enticing conditions. But...”

The fox asked a question.

Nine-Tail Girl: “It’s too bad. ...Mogami will lose Komahime. We will have no

heir. Currently, nothing remains for us as Mogami and we will simply be absorbed by Matsudaira, won't we? ...Did you really think I would agree to something that renders Mogami entirely meaningless?"

Chapter 74: Viewer at a Place of Ending

第七十四章

『終わり場の見者』



定まる未来を
先見て変えることは
定まらぬ未来を
手に入れる事か
配点（決断）

If you are to look ahead and change

A fixed future

Are you acquiring

An unfixed future?

Point Allocation (Decision)

Yoshiyasu listened to Yoshiaki's words and watched her face.

"Sviet Rus might accept this. They can avoid losing their territory, after all. And Kagekatsu is still young for a demon. But...Mogami is different."

All emotion had vanished from Yoshiaki's face, but a tremor filled her voice.

"Komahime is already a ghost. Once her regrets are gone, she will vanish. Mogami's revoked clanhood, continued existence, and presence as a bloodline of officers in Mito Matsudaira are all meaningless. After all, Mogami's royal line ends. Matsudaira, you wish to create a new king and manage Mogami's land? Isn't that just a nice way of describing usurpation?"

No, it isn't, thought Yoshiyasu.

Yoshiaki was trying to say Matsudaira was usurping Mogami by constructing the northern community.

But Yoshiyasu felt that was inaccurate. She did not think it; she felt it.

Yoshiaki was not talking about the Mogami clan being beholden to someone else.

...You just don't want to lose Komahime, do you?

Komahime had used her doomed destiny. In her desire for Mogami to face their destiny properly, she had taken her own life as an example and she was now a ghost who would disappear once she was cleansed of her regrets.

She would eventually disappear. And she would do so before Yoshiaki. It was her understanding of that which led Yoshiaki to say this. She understood it all too well, but that pain was driving her to this.

“————”

Yes, thought Yoshiyasu.

My sister and Yoshiyori were probably thinking something similar.

They had used their doomed destinies. Komahime had seen meaning in that and saved what she could, but things were different for those who were left behind. That was why Yoshiyori had told them to smile.

Yoshiaki remained expressionless. She was always smiling, but she was hiding her expression now.

...That's the same as crying.

She only had tears of regret for the person who had found meaning in moving out ahead and being lost.

What about me? If I'm the same as Yoshiaki when it comes to my sister and Yoshiyori...

“...Yoshiaki.”

Yoshiyasu spoke without thinking.

The fox turned to face her, but she felt no fear in her heart.

She was the same. She and this fox queen held something similar inside. And...

...So that's it.

Yoshiyasu finally realized why she had been placed in charge of the Mogami negotiations.

No, she had already understood most of it. There were a few common factors if one compared Satomi's history with Mogami's. So...

“Yoshiaki, as the representative of the Satomi clan, I would like to make a proposal to both you and Musashi's Vice President.”

“...What might that be?”

Vice President: “To me too?”

“Yes, that's right. I am making this proposal as Satomi's Chancellor and

Student Council President, not as a diplomat for Musashi.”

The vassal next to her and the salmon seemed to feel out of place and looked back and forth between Yoshiyasu and Yoshiaki, but Yoshiyasu ignored them.

“Could we establish a joint government between Satomi and Mogami?”

At first, Yoshiaki did not understand what she had been told.

Her thoughts were currently on Komahime and Mogami’s future. And the discussion should have led to what would happen if Mogami joined their proposed northern community.

And yet...

“A joint government...between Satomi and Mogami...?”

“I will say ‘testament’ for the moment. I am not talking about anything official; this would be purely functional in nature. And beyond just Mogami, I would also like for you to take a look at Satomi’s government. And I would like to learn from Mogami’s government.”

Meaning...

“I would take a double inherited name of someone from both clans.”

Ridiculous, thought Yoshiaki. Because...

...I don’t understand.

“Aren’t you just trying to take control of Mogami now that we have lost Komahime?”

She knew Yoshiyasu was not that shrewd, but someone could have put her up to it. So Yoshiaki made sure to be as suspicious as possible.

“Mogami is destined to lose much. What could you learn from us?”

“Satomi is already a ruined nation. And just like Mogami, we will eventually disappear.” Yoshiyasu spoke quietly. “I have lost my sister, someone who was like a brother, and my other comrades. ...I have nothing left.”

“Then do you regret that?”

Yoshiaki moved on reflex and drew Onikiri.

...You have nothing left, do you!?

If that was true, Onikiri would cut nothing. But if that was a lie or simple sweet words meant to earn sympathy...

“You will lose it all, Satomi!”

In the very instant she drew the sword, Yoshiaki cut Yoshiyasu.

That blade cut the hidden. It cut the people supporting the target rather than the target herself.

The ancient divine weapon Onikiri accurately sliced through Yoshiaki’s “hidden side”.

Adele opened her eyes after squeezing them shut.

When Yoshiaki had sent out her slash, Adele had been unable to even protect her face. That was half due to her proximity and half due to the speed of the strike.

But there was not even a scratch on her glasses.

“Um...”

Adele touched her own body while looking at Yoshiaki who had swung Onikiri in a horizontal line.

...Head: check. Stomach: check. Hips: check. Chest: ...Oh, wait. I didn’t have anything there in the first place.

She groaned as she checked over her body, but she found not even a hair on her head had been harmed. And...

“Satomi President...”

Yoshiyasu simply stood there. The distant festival music washed over her back as she stared at Yoshiaki who had swung Onikiri at her.

“Yoshiaki, you are mistaken about something.”

“And what is that?”

“Musashi and I are not yet comrades and not yet to the point of supporting each other. Even as inexperienced as I am, they allow me to stand alongside as we simply head in the same direction. ...They are nothing more than the other people who saw what I was shown by the people I lost. They do not conform, sympathize, or scold. They are nothing more than a group of idiots who face the same direction and – even if they face some setbacks – fight the unease while never giving up on making a comeback.”

And...

“That in and of itself is important to me because I feel the need to stand alongside them eventually.”

Marube-ya: “Sounds like a group of untrustworthy people who are one wrong step away from wondering why they want anything to do with each other!”

Mal-Ga: “What are you talking about? I know exactly what I gain from these relationships. We can’t forget about that.”

Asama: “Gain!? I’m pretty sure I lose a lot more than I gain!”

Those people, sighed Yoshiyasu when she saw the ruckus on her sign frame, but she was somehow relieved to see that lively activity.

It had indeed been nice to have that noise drawing her focus after she had lost something.

Then she saw Yoshiaki returning Onikiri to its scabbard. The woman smiled bitterly.

“So rather than comrades, you see them as people you hope will someday hold that position? ...It is true I cannot cut that.”

“Yes,” replied Yoshiyasu. “Please think of what I said as a suggestion. After all, I intend to take back Satomi, but it no longer exists and I have nothing certain that I can trust in.”

She indicated Murasamemaru at her hip and Yoshiaki’s bitter smile grew. She then looked at Yoshiyasu.

“In that case, we might indeed need a joint government.” She relaxed her shoulders. “But... Shakenobe, bring the vassal some sweet sake.”

“Right away, mon!”

The salmon swam through the air while expressing its joy over receiving instructions from its master. And Yoshiaki asked a question as she watched it leave.

“Why did you choose me?”

“I would like to borrow the ability that brought Mogami this far in a single generation. And I would like to learn from it.”

“Why? Once you take back Satomi, the world will be at peace under Matsudaira’s rule. ...It would be best to find a teacher within Matsudaira. Why aren’t you doing that?”

“Judge.” Yoshiyasu nodded. “To be blunt, I can never tell what they’re going to do.”

Marube-ya: “Wow, who here would stoop to plotting behind people’s backs?”

Worshiper: “Evil must not go unpunished! Especially in the north, land of the young fairies!”

Flat Vassal: “Um, sorry, but could you not say things that make me want to comment out loud...”

She had given them material to work with. *I need to be more careful*, thought Yoshiyasu.

“I would like to have Satomi make a quick recovery once I take it back. As I said before, the Testament descriptions say Satomi too will lose its status as a clan.”

She knew that perfectly well. In 1614 after Sekigahara, the Satomi clan lost its heir and lost its clanhood.

“Before then, I would like to help Satomi recover to ensure the livelihoods of the people gathered there and to show them a future. So I have abandoned the idea of building a nation in a peaceful world. I must make sure Satomi recovers as quickly as possible to show everyone that we can make a comeback.”

“Then let me ask you this, Satomi. What do you intend to do after that?”

“Well,” said Yoshiyasu. “Even after Satomi loses its clanhood, the Satomi bloodline will remain in the region. For example, many of our people will serve as officers in Mito Matsudaira. Yes, in Mito where the Mogami bloodline also ends up. Do you understand what that means?” she asked. “Satomi is a small nation. It could disappear at any time. So we have long discussed at our academy how to leave behind as much as possible. And I make my suggestion as a modification of that plan. I will establish a joint government with Mogami and, Yoshiaki, you teach me your style of governing. I will watch you as you help Satomi recover and I will learn from it, but you can also watch me and...”

She hesitated, but she said it.

“If I become a suitable politician in your eyes, then please give me the name of your heir.”

“———”

“You understand, don’t you?”

Mogami Yoshiaki’s heir had a certain name...

“That name would be Mogami Yoshiyasu, wouldn’t it? ...That would be the perfect name for my double inherited name.”

You fool, thought Yoshiaki.

She had never expected the name of that Yoshiyasu to come up here.

...She really is a fool.

Yoshiaki knew that Mogami’s heir, Mogami Yoshiyasu, died before inheriting the clan.

And due to the plotting of a treacherous retainer, Yoshiaki and Yoshiyasu

were on poor terms and Yoshiyasu eventually committed suicide after being attacked by someone.

The Testament said they had originally gotten along well. And after Yoshiaki learned that their discord was due to a plot, he had wept when Yoshiyasu's head had arrived and he had searched out and punished the treacherous retainer.

That series of events was why Komahime had not also inherited the name of Mogami Yoshiyasu. She had certainly never expected someone to show up now and attempt to take Yoshiyasu's name.

"Do you know who the treacherous retainer was who brought discord between Mogami Yoshiyasu and me?"

"He bore the surname Satomi, didn't he?"

When the girl answered with a bitter smile, Yoshiaki could only say, "Correct."

Yoshiyasu knew it all and yet she still wished for the name. If she did inherit the name, she intended to handle it all herself.

...Yes...

Yoshiaki had considered it before. What would she have done if the Testament Union had insisted that Komahime also inherited the name of Mogami Yoshiyasu?

There was only one answer: she would have done whatever it took to protect Komahime. So...

"If I do consider you worthy, I could indeed give you the name of Mogami Yoshiyasu..."

"Then..."

Yoshiaki continued with a bitter smile.

"No. ...That's right, Yoshiyasu. And Musashi Vice President. I will not go along with your proposal. After all, Komahime is still in view. There are still too many uncertainties about the future of the world. So Mogami will..."

This was her answer.

“Mogami will...put off this decision and do as we wish until Sekigahara.”

Masazumi breathed in and then out.

“You have my thanks...Mogami Yoshiaki.”

Mogami’s decision was essentially the same as accepting their proposal. She was holding off on answering because nothing would be clear until after Westphalia. So Mogami would...

Nine-Tail Girl: “We will do as we wish. Yes, we will aim for expanding our territory just like Sviet Rus. And...Satomi, you do as you wish as well. If you wish to take me as your teacher and model yourself after me, then aim for Mogami Yoshiyasu’s name if you like. That future is also a possibility.”

But...

Nine-Tail Girl: “Not today.”

However...

Nine-Tail Girl: “When I wish to look even further into the future, I will remember this northern community and Satomi’s request. And that may be the kind of future Komahime wants...”

Those words reminded Masazumi of her mother.

She recalled her past in Mikawa.

...That’s right.

Her mother had always cooked for her, did the laundry, and did other housework without saying anything about it. She had stayed by Masazumi’s side when she had a cold, she had worried about Masazumi’s father, and she had stayed by his side as well.

How much time had she spent with her mother? And how much of her mother’s time had been spent on her?

Whether that was good or bad was not a question she could answer, but...

“Yoshiaki.”

She had something to say.

“Musashi can promise you one thing about the coming battle with Hashiba. ... If we are within reach of Komahime, we will take her back. We will not allow anyone to be lost. That is Musashi’s policy and what we swore at Mikatagahara. So...”

So...

“I don’t know what will happen, but you can wait and see how well we do before making your decision.”

Nine-Tail Girl: “You’re raising my expectations too high. But...”

Yoshiaki paused for about three breaths.

Nine-Tail Girl: “I will at least remember your consideration.”

They had their answer from Mogami.

In the meeting hall, Tenzou saw Masazumi’s “judge” on the sign frame he shared with Mary.

As the Vice President and leader of the discussion, Masazumi’s acknowledgement indicated the end of that topic. Which meant...

...Sviet Rus and Mogami have both decided to expand their territory.

Their actions were correct in terms of the history recreation. But there was a difference from before.

“They intend to do so without worrying what Hashiba thinks...”

Sviet Rus and Mogami would both “expand their territory” in accordance with the Testament descriptions. But they would not obey Hashiba’s instructions or warnings even though Hashiba had conquered Edo and Satomi.

Both nations would set their sights on Matsudaira establishing their territory after Sekigahara and on the future northern community.

They were not cooperating in any obvious way in the present, but Musashi knew that the two nations would not support Hashiba and would ultimately fall in line with Musashi.

It was a pseudo-cooperation that looked to the future.

There were of course plenty of problems and one of those was especially large.

“The fight against P.A. Oda.”

Sviet Rus was in the process of discussing that.

The Musashi group had been given chairs and waiters had lined up tea and snacks on a side table. When they looked around, they saw the Committee Heads, Saitou, Shigenaga, and even Kagekatsu standing in a circle and holding a quick meeting.

Tenzou could read their lips to grasp some of what they were saying.

...*P.A. Oda.*

Sviet Rus would no longer focus on Hashiba and would continue on to Sekigahara while expanding their territory and settling things through discussions as they had before. But that implied opposing and defying P.A. Oda and Hashiba who were holding Sviet Rus and Oushuu in check.

P.A. Oda was a powerful nation. They controlled the Testament Union now, they had a large aerial fleet, they had dragon line reactors, and they were served by many skilled commanders.

Currently, that nation held more than half of the Far East in their hand.

That was who Sviet Rus and Mogami would be making an enemy of.

That could only be called reckless, but they had a reason for doing so.

“They’re going to use the history recreation as a shield, aren’t they? According to the Testament descriptions, the Oda clan’s invasion of Uesugi was never completed and they never did invade Oushuu.”

“Master Tenzou, will P.A. Oda really obey the Testament descriptions?”

“They must. But as things are, they will use the greatest interpretations they can manage.”

Tenzou showed Mary a sign frame. It displayed a map of the Far East. Long arrows started in the central Kinki region and extended to the west, north, and

east. A few smaller arrows appeared as if to fill in the gaps.

“These are the invasion routes P.A. Oda is currently taking. They extend nearly to the entire Far East, but they have not taken it all. ...Hexagone Française, Tres España, the Kyushu and Shikoku forces, Kantou, and Oushuu have yet to fall.”

The idiot turned Tenzou’s way while he, Mitotsudaira, and Horizon ate a castella with a layer of adzuki beans.

“But aren’t things going pretty good for Monkey Girl and P.A. Oda?”

“Their invasions are creating discrepancies between the history recreations of the world nations and the Far East.”

Tenzou zoomed in separately on the K.P.A. Italia and Sviet Rus regions.

“For example, now that Hashiba has invaded K.P.A. Italia, Mouri can invade from the north and crush Hashiba.”

“Then why don’t they?”

“Because Mouri has no such history in the Testament descriptions.”

“Listen,” said Tenzou to the idiot. “Let us say, Toori-dono, that Mouri crushed Hashiba’s invasion even though the Testament descriptions say nothing of the sort.”

“Yes, what happens then, Tenzou-dono?”

...Why does that piss me off so much!?

Then the idiot turned toward Mary and she smiled toward Tenzou.

“What happens then, Tenzou-dono?”

...Why does that warm my heart so much!?

“Toori-dono, I have the heart of a saint right now, so it would take a lot to get under my skin. Give it your best shot.”

“Oh, that’s good to hear. To make sure Asama didn’t find out about the porn games I bought, I had them sent to your parents’ house in your name, so can

you hold onto those for me?”

“You are the worst! People might consider those things, but no one ever actually does them!!”

Tenzou took a breath.

“Anyway, if they do something not found in the Testament descriptions, it at least gives their opponent a justification to do something equivalent to them. Crushing Hashiba’s invasion isn’t worth exposing themselves to a retaliatory invasion not found in P.A. Oda’s history, right? It is the same for P.A. Oda. They cannot force things through too much.”

Tenzou took another breath.

“Also, P.A. Oda must be very careful about their history recreation. After all, it is about time they must face a historical turning point. ...And no turning point is greater than the assassination of Oda Nobunaga.”

Nobunaga’s assassination really is P.A. Oda’s greatest turning point, thought Tenzou.

...That is the fall of a superpower’s leader.

The time was approaching. Several events from an age beyond that were already being recreated.

“The time will eventually come for Nobunaga to disappear. So P.A. Oda will want to control when that time comes. Thus...”

“They will follow the different regions’ history recreations to ensure they do not create an opening for others to interfere, right?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Judge. That is exactly right. ...That is likely why Sviet Rus was able to side with Musashi. After all, Sviet Rus’s battle against P.A Oda’s Shibata forces ends when the Shibata forces retreat due to Nobunaga’s death.”

So...

“A largescale battle with Sviet Rus would only bring P.A. Oda closer to Nobunaga’s death. The standard choice would be to avoid a battle or keep it

small, so I doubt they will make a major invasion.”

As soon as Tenzou said that, an embodiment of love with short sleeves, short pants, and glossy skin ran in from the corridor on the right. He spun around, clapped twice, and put on a carefree smile.

“It’s an emergency! Shibata has made a major invasion!”

“That is not the standard choice.”

Tenzou felt the need to immediately point that out to prevent the damage against him. Mitotsudaira averted her gaze and the idiot and Horizon both glared at him, but Mary alone tilted her head.

“What does this mean?”

Tenzou thought while looking to the Sviet Rus group. *That’s right*, he realized before speaking his conclusion aloud.

“They likely predicted the three nations would side with Musashi and acted accordingly. They must hope to gain the upper hand by taking action before the meeting between Date and Musashi is complete.”

Meaning...

“There haven’t been any responses from Date or Musashi for a while now. ... Date is likely in negotiation and Musashi must have seen the movements of P.A. Oda’s Kantou division as they responded to the actions of the Shibata forces.”

Tenzou looked down to see a divine transmission from Musashi. It said, “Emergency Situation: On Alert”

The Kantou P.A. Oda group was on the move.

Chapter 75: Attacker of the Dance Hall

第七十五章

『舞踏会場の出撃者』

そう決めてたの
もう決めてたの
こう決めてたの
配点 (無制御)



I had decided that

I had decided already

I had decided this

Point Allocation (No Control)

Alarms filled the Ariake.

The streets were full of stands and people like a festival was underway, but everyone had come to a stop to look at the sign frames that appeared in the air.

Gin looked to one of those sign frames while standing protectively behind Masazumi who sat atop the academy bridge.

“A combat fleet led by the Jurakudai is moving northwest?”

“This appears to be an advance fleet, Gin. Depending on how you look at this, the Azuchi Castle could be seen as rushing to bring supplies to the Shibata forces and Hashiba.”

It was obvious why they were doing this. The advance fleet led by the Jurakudai was meant to attack Sviet Rus. And the Azuchi Castle was providing them with supplies before continuing on to attack Mouri.

Defense of Edo and Satomi would likely be left to Takigawa Ichimasu who had arrived in Houjou.

The sign frame showed Niwa looking toward them while standing on the accelerating Jurakudai’s bow. And Komahime was with her, giving off a ghostly glow below the moonlight.

“Where do you think they’re headed?”

“Novgorod,” said Masazumi as she sat with her back turned to Gin.

She had several sign frames open. The great number of them made the anteater on her shoulder seem careless in its management, but their numbers only grew further.

And yet she did not close any of them. She traced her fingers along what seemed to be the important points and merely stacked them up once she was

done checking on them. Their numbers were in the hundreds, but she would occasionally divide the stack and stick one in the middle.

...Does that mean she understands them all and knows where they are?

Juana did something similar, but her method was to open a vast amount of data, locate the important pieces, and read those. She had the eminent sense and knowledge needed to grasp the whole and guess where the important pieces were located, but she did not understand everything she saw in real time.

But this Vice President was different. Most likely, she lacked Juana's sense of how to pull the important points out of the whole. But instead...

...She has an incredible ability to speed read and understand it all...

Gin was aware the girl was always reading books. But...

"Musashi...Vice President?"

"Eh? Oh, what is it? I'm focusing on this right now, so I can't divert too much attention your way."

"Judge. I just have one question. Do you always do it like this?"

"What do you mean 'like this'?"

...I knew it.

She did not realize how abnormal her own actions were. To her, profiling such a massive amount of information was an everyday thing. So...

"I mean stacking up all those sign frames..."

"Oh, judge. I've always jotted down the things I notice, but sign frames are really convenient. And Tsukinowa has recently learned how to help and can actually keep up with me. I'm glad I don't need all that paper anymore."

She even sounded like she was enjoying it. It was a lot like running into someone at the bookstore and having them introduce you to their favorite book. And...

"Okay, I've got a pretty good picture of this now. ...It really is Novgorod."

The Vice President's shoulders rose and fell. The action caused the anteater to

bounce up a little, but...

“Maa.”

It opened a sign frame showing a map of the Sviet Rus region. A ribbon line showed Shibata’s fleet advancing toward Novgorod in western Sviet Rus.

But that was not all. Lines were approaching from Sviet Rus’s southern border and from Kantou.

“Sakuma, Mori, and the Jurakudai’s Hidetsugu fleet,” said Gin. “All of their spare forces intend to join Shibata for the attack on Novgorod.”

“Should we see this as P.A. Oda fearing that we will meet with Holland’s Prince of Orange at Novgorod?”

“It is true P.A. Oda would find it inconvenient if we met with Holland, one of Westphalia’s victors. So I believe they may intend to bring down Novgorod using the fighting that leads into the Battle of Nanao Castle or the Battle of Tedorigawa.”

“Judge.” The Vice President scratched her head. “Novgorod might contain the oldest Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy. And the Prince of Orange said we could discuss the Genesis Project.”

So...

“It would be a bit of a problem if Novgorod is brought down or taken by P.A. Oda. ...And if the Prince of Orange is captured, it will change the very lead-up to Westphalia.”

“Then, Vice President, do you intend to send out the Musashi?”

“Not yet.” The Vice President brushed up her bangs and lightly flipped her wrist around. “We still don’t know what Date will do. ...And I know all too well why. Simply put, the three nations meeting isn’t over yet. So...”

So...

Vice President: “Mukai, Urquiaga. We’re counting on you.”

Suzu faced someone.

They were five meters apart and the other person wore a dress over her prosthetic arms and legs.

“Narumi...-san...”

“What is it, Musashi Ambassador?”

Good, thought Suzu. She let me use her name. But...

“Can you...still not side with...Musashi?”

“Testament. That’s a good question. To be honest, I didn’t expect for you to solve our impossible problem like that. ...Who would have thought you could paint a picture of our future without relying on your military might?”

“That’s right,” said Katakura while moving to the right end of the hall. “That had nothing to do with using Musashi’s military might to accomplish something. You showed us an image of the future and had us decide what we would do and what we wanted to do. I’m jealous. That style of negotiation is only possible for a nation destined to become the overwhelming victors.”

Katakura laughed quietly by the wall.

“Of course, if Musashi is going to be the victor, you’ll have to show us something at least that nice if we’re to negotiate. I think you did an excellent job. And your Chancellor was serious about that, which is what makes him so damned hard to deal with. Only an idiot could be so confident you’ll win just because you’re going to be the victors in the future.”

“Is that...a compliment...?”

Suzu tilted her head and Katakura nodded.

“It is. I’m certain now that Musashi will attempt to take the path of the great ruler. Instead of just following Hashiba down the path they’re taking, you intend to catch up to and overtake them.”

“But you can’t do that now,” said Narumi. “You understand why, don’t you?”

Suzu nodded.

She did understand why Musashi could not pursue Hashiba at the moment.

“Masamune...-san...?”

Masamune's head hung down as she sat in the throne-like chair at the far end of the hall. She was limp, unmoving, and almost seemed to be sleeping, but she was not.

There was a line of wind above and behind her.

It was the Seiryu's exit.

With a pulsing tempo, the wind and thickness of air flowed out. It gradually grew and Narumi opened her mouth as the moving air washed over her back.

"Let me be honest: looking at our Testament descriptions, the Date clan cannot survive without Matsudaira. ...No, to be more accurate, perhaps I should say we cannot achieve our greatest victory without Matsudaira."

"Then...!"

"Please understand. ...The closer the relationship, the more important the initial construction of that relationship becomes. We can't have Musashi looking down on us from the beginning. We must be on equal footing so we can walk together. So please understand. ...Date does not want sympathy, privilege, fame, or stability. As the people of Oushuu, a land of resistance and the home of many historic warriors, the Date clan wishes to stand side by side with the Far East's future rulers. That is all we need to be satisfied."

Narumi smiled bitterly and turned away from Suzu.

"But that doesn't look possible. You are sure to move out ahead of us and overtake Hashiba."

The pressure grew behind her.

"The Jurakudai is on its way to Novgorod. As it leaves with Kojirou sleeping aboard, the Seiryu's bonds will be removed and it will arrive here. And it will likely be a fully physical version. As long as the Seiryu is here, Date can't negotiate properly."

"You really...can't?"

"No, we can't," confirmed Narumi. "Unfortunately, Date currently lacks the definite fighting force needed to defeat the Seiryu. At best, we can endure its attack. So let me be very clear: leave this place at once. And hurry back to the

Musashi. Return so you can tell them that Date can't go with Musashi."

Once she said that, the air swelled out behind Narumi and something appeared as if rising up on its own.

"Unturning...Centi...pede..."

"Now go. ...I don't want you to see us fail."

Narumi was saying they could not stop the Seiryu and that Date could not go with Musashi.

And Suzu did not like the sound of that. So...

Bell: "Toori-kun...!"

Me: "Eh? You need something?"

Asama: "Yes, I do! Hurry! Oh, you go ahead, Suzu-san!"

Bell: "R-right! U-um...right now...D-Date...not looking good...um...!"

Suzu gave a shout.

Bell: "We can't let it...end like this!"

Me: "Okay, okay. Hey, Uqui, you need to finish up the elder sister character's route, right? You have my permission, so go a little nuts there."

Eh? thought Suzu as she turned around. There was a wall there. A wall unshaken by the dragon's wind.

It was Urquiaga.

He slowly walked forward while raising one of his forearms. He patted her on the back and then took another step forward, but...

"He may be an idiot, but I have our leader's permission. I wanted to avoid doing this because a bodyguard isn't supposed to step out front and solve all the problems, but Mukai, what do you say as the local commander? Explain the situation to me."

"R-right. Judge," said Suzu. "Can you...persuade them?"

"Hm. Unlike Masazumi, I am a pacifist, so I might just be able to do that."

Vice President: "I didn't start a war earlier, did I!? Weren't you watching!?"

Gold Mar: “But wasn’t it your meeting that got Shibata and Niwa moving?”

Perhaps so, but Urquiaga scratched his head. And...

“Now, then.”

He faced Narumi and he spoke.

“You are quite pathetic, Date Narumi. What happened to the willpower I saw the day before yesterday?”

Narumi stood in front of the half-dragon and felt the dragon’s breath spilling out behind her.

The Seiryu had yet to come out, but there was effectively nothing she could do.

The Seiryu had been worn down. It would not yet have recovered from the damage it took the night before. But...

...It’s no use.

The Seiryu would go all out in order to recover and to protect Masamune with its wounded body.

And this time, the physical Seiryu and ether Seiryu would likely be fully joined for the first time.

“Incredible, isn’t it?”

The ether light and wind escaping the gate were far greater than the night before. The gentle start was all the proof Narumi needed. The Seiryu likely knew that it would harm Masamune if it appeared all at once.

But Narumi understood. After her few encounters with the Seiryu, she understood all too well. Even with Unturning Centipede, stopping this version of the Seiryu would be difficult.

The scales on its throat had been shattered. It had vanished like that last night, so there was only one way to fully stop the Seiryu.

...Use that opening to stab deep into its throat and to its brainstem.

Even with a large god of war, accomplishing that in the midst of battle would be nearly impossible.

The only upside was that it would come down to a single blow instead of a protracted exchange of blows. Date's plan was for her to pierce its throat with Unturning Centipede.

...But it won't work.

Its power was greater than the night before. Once it appeared, even approaching would be difficult. It was even possible the ether interference would cause Unturning Centipede and her prosthetics to break apart. So...

"Pathetic, hm? You don't hold back, do you?"

She wanted to tell him he did not understand her. But that would only be a complaint. She was Date's Vice Chancellor and the last person they could afford to have break. So...

"I am not pathetic. I am merely being pessimistic. ...I will do what I can."

"The wind is blowing up your skirt."

"I'm used to it."

"Are you saying you feel no embarrassment?"

"I'm used to putting up with it."

"Well said."

"Don't pray toward it."

"Heh. You have grown a lot stronger in this short time..."

"Try to remember who it was who grabbed my breast."

Once she said that, a sudden smile came to Narumi's face. It surprised even her. After all...

...I won't have to deal with this stupid half-dragon anymore.

She did not hide it.

Their exchanges involved ridiculous things that would never happen normally. She could never predict what would happen, the concept of hierarchy seemed

to vanish, and his silly responses contained no unneeded concern. Most important of all, he was about as powerful as her and would clash with her without hesitation. No one within the established order of the Date clan would do that, so the presence of someone like that...

...That's right.

It made her happy.

It seemed to tell her that she was not the only person like this.

As the Vice Chancellor with prosthetic limbs and a desire for battle, she had never felt that anyone could be with her. She had figured that no one could keep up with her body. Even if they were kind to her, she always maintained her doubts.

What about him?

She did not know.

And she felt that knowing would not be enough.

So she tried to turn her back on him. Just like when he would say crucial things to her, she averted her gaze.

"Hurry up and leave. This is Date's battlefield."

"Don't go, Narumi."

She heard a voice.

"You cannot win on your own."

What he said shamed her as a Vice Chancellor. He was essentially saying she was weak.

But even she thought he was right. So...

"I shall assist you."

When he said that, Narumi replied half on reflex.

"D-..."

She turned back toward him.

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

Why was her initial reason that it would put him in danger?

Why did she only later remember that this was Date’s problem?

“The Seiryu issue has to do with Date’s leader! If we allow Musashi to interfere during our meeting, it will create a debt we owe Musashi!”

“Can’t you just hire me as a mercenary? ...Yes, that is easily resolved. But I doubt you would accept that answer.”

“Of course not. I’m not going to gamble on some convenient interpretation.”

Before she had even finished speaking, he opened his body’s thrusters in standby mode. The temperature difference created a thin white fog around him. Even so, he took another step toward her.

“I request a duel, Date Vice Chancellor. ...This is coming from Musashi’s 2nd Special Duty Officer, so surely you will accept.”

“Wha-...!? Do you realize the situation here!?”

“This is a confrontation between the two of us,” replied the half-dragon. “If I lose, I will leave. If I win, you will hear me out.”

...This idiot.

She did not know what he was thinking, but she had her position as Vice Chancellor to think about. If he would leave if he lost, then that would be the best solution.

After all, she had Unturning Centipede, just like on the deck the day before. Unfortunately for him, he could not defeat Unturning Centipede. His acceleration and armor may have been superior, but his half-dragon body could not handle the continual re-casting of defense spells or the independent power of her legs and arms. But...

“Why?”

“You don’t understand?” This is to complete the elder sister character route.”

...I see... Hmm, so that’s it...

Her heart grew oddly cold.

Guys really do like those genre classifications, don't you? Hmm... I see...

“Fine then. It looks like I have a good enough reason myself. Namely, to protect Masamune.”

She was perfectly willing to settle this with her full strength.

“Here I go.”

“Come.”

She boarded Unturning Centipede before he even got the word out. She had some trouble preventing her red dress from being caught, but...

...Yes.

Narumi set her entire body in motion.

And she knew this would be the last time she danced with him.

Chapter 76: Unperceived Dancers

第七十六章

『知覚外の踊り手達』

そう決めたのだ
もう決めたのだ
こう決めたのだ
配点 (非制御)



I'd decided that

I'd decided already

I'd decided this

Point Allocation (Without Control)

The battle was at full speed from the very first strike.

Unturning Centipede and the half-dragon both had great height and reach. The half-dragon had greater acceleration, but the centipede was more maneuverable. So when their attacks intersected...

“Ohhh!”

The half-dragon generally pushed while the centipede deflected, dodged, and...

“...!!”

The centipede used her weapons to push back with greater numbers.

As large as the hall was, it was still located within Sendai Castle. In that 100 meter by 50 meter space, the centipede could not make full use of her mandible swords and instead repeatedly summoned them at high speed.

Meanwhile, the half-dragon deflected the mandible swords with his armor, but...

“Catholic Power!”

He also used spell shields. He activated smallish handheld ones to respond to the centipedes great numbers. Fragments of shields scattered as they blocked the continuous strikes.

“Inquisition Kit #311! María Tacón!”

He pulled one meter brass hammers from his sleeve. The striking end was made into a model of the Virgin Mary making a heel kick. He held one in the three fingers of each forearm and snapped them forward with his draconic strength. He slammed the dual strikes toward the centipede.

He was fast, but hopelessly outnumbered compared to the centipede's number of attacks. However, he had the greater strength.

The two hammers struck the arms the centipede used for defense. And she of course repeatedly summoned new arms.

Ether light surrounded the centipede's swinging arms and they seemed to shake. The half-dragon's hammers were deflected with what sounded like a sawblade striking rock.

The half-dragon did not stop. He let go of the deflected hammers and moved to grab Unturning Centipede's arms. Then he caught the flying hammer grips on his forearms and spun them back around.

As the spinning hammers swung up from his forearms like hooks, the half-dragon's hands moved to grab Unturning Centipede's defense arms from above.

Unturning Centipede swung her arms down so they would not be caught. And before the half-dragon's hammers could finish their rotation and strike her arms, she caught their grips on her own arms to steal them.

Then she spun the hammers back around with her arms.

The hammers had been rotating up from below, but they now spun around the centipede's arms to swing a counterattack against the half-dragon's arms.

The half-dragon responded by pulling his arms back and once more scooping up the hammer grips.

They did not grab them.

The brass striking weapons that looked like gold continued to spin back and forth between them as they continued avoiding the attacks like that.

"Let's up the ante!"

He added two, then two more, and...

"A heel-stepping dance is the charm of bondage!!"

A total of sixteen golden spikes danced within their exchange of offense and defense.

Suzu sensed it.

She did not understand colors. She lived her life listening to sounds and sensing heat and the wind. And most importantly, she had lived by trusting in her own heart as it tried to sense the outside world. So...

...*Wow...*

She could detect and follow Urquiaga and Narumi's actions, but she could not comprehend them.

She did not understand, but that did not frighten her.

She liked both Urquiaga and Narumi. She had not known the latter for long, but Narumi had helped her put on her dress before the dance. When Suzu had tried to perceive her expression as she performed the work with practiced hand...

"I have long been in charge of dressing Masamune."

Then Narumi had laughed.

It had been a quiet laugh. Suzu doubted it was something she did often. It seemed to have slipped out. But Suzu thought that was just as meaningful as always laughing.

She thought it had been a nice laugh.

And she liked people with a nice laugh.

Urquiaga was the same. He would occasionally make a quiet nasal laugh. She did not know if he was usually in a bad mood, but when he was happy, he would do that.

She liked their exchange of offense and defense.

The two of them had to be moving around, throwing quick strikes and kicks, rotating around, performing feints, spinning into a kick to keep some distance between them, and otherwise attacking each other.

...*They're trying to take each other's hand...*

Were they up to sixteen hammers that were catching on and spinning around

their bodies while passing between them? The hammers were rotating, passing back and forth, and intersecting so often that she had lost count.

As the hammers spun around their arms, wrists, elbows, sides, shoulders, necks, and even legs, the combatants would occasionally catch one on the end of their kicking foot and throw it toward the other, or they would catch one on their neck and either swing their entire body to throw it back or throw it back from their thigh as their opponent tried to grab their wrist.

Again and again, they would throw them back when their opponent tried to grab their hand and they would brush their opponent's hand away while also pursuing that opponent. They would pull back the arm being pursued while also moving the other up in scooping motion to obstruct one of their opponent's hammers.

It was like several stars were whizzing around them to decorate their motion.

Suzu thought that everything decorating their spinning dance was wonderful.

She did not understand colors. Nor did she understand light or darkness. She knew how those things were "beautiful", but she could not directly perceive that beauty.

So she believed. She believed that this high-speed exchange of rotation and revolution was beautiful. She simply believed that these two people in the outside world were beautiful, just like they were in their everyday lives.

This was beyond what she could perceive and she could not explain it in words.

She believed that what she could perceive was beautiful.

And then the two of them sped up even further. They would approach close enough that their toes nearly touched, the density of strikes grew, and...

"...!"

Swords and shields appeared.

No, they had already been there, but within the sixteen rotations...

"_____"

The continuous exchange of sword strikes and defense resumed.

Urquiaga did not hold back in the slightest.

His shields were no longer for defense. As soon as they opened, he hit them from behind for a shield attack.

Even if they were spells, these shields were meant for inquisition use. Each one could endure around seven mandible sword attacks, so he opened them on the left and right and repeatedly struck the mandible sword with them.

A great noise rang out, but he did not stop moving. He tried to spin to Narumi's side as if checking on his footing. And he tried to grab her hand in both of his hands.

"...Oh."

A mandible sword flew in to stop him, but he did not give up.

Yes, a half-dragon did not give up.

Urquiaga believed that the half-dragons were the strongest race. There were demons, angels, spirits, and half-gods, but the aerial half-dragons could fly swiftly through the air and that was cool.

Yes, it was cool. And what was cool was strong. What could be more obvious?

And since he was strong, he did not need to give up. If he did happen to lose, it would only be a trivial mistake. He would never wholly lose, so he did not need to feel down about it. Half-dragons were strong. They were strong in body and mind. They were unbeatable.

That was why Urquiaga had chosen to become an inquisitor. There was also a reason his father had named him after Naitou Kiyonari, a magistrate. Because he was strong, he had once thought that he could give meaning to his strength by justly judging others.

At the same time, he liked humans. *Some claim humans are supposed to be our prey, but I'm not so sure. People like Ohiroshiki do seem like they would make an excellent source of food, but I have no desire to eat him. When I looked at him in that way before, he blushed, so I need to send him to hell at some*

point.

“Urquiaga-kun!?”

Oops. A mandible sword got this close while I was lost in thought. I'll hit it with my shield to spin it around and...there! A hit.

Nice one, Mukai. But unfortunately, I “like” you in a different way too.

My standards for what I like are quite strict.

It likely comes down to me being too strong. And my heart being too just. When I see someone weaker than me, I do not feel a desire to prey on them; I feel a desire to protect them. That may be a racial memory of my ancestors being the guardians who protected inexperienced mankind when we lived in the heavens. A racial memory. Now that's cool. I feel like I just got a strength boost.

Simply put, half-dragons are strong and I am a just person, so I can handle the weak with ease.

And that is why I love strong women. Which is why...

“Yes.”

I love elder sisters.

The Centipede and the half-dragon's movements were speed itself.

They deflected each other's arms, sparks scattered, swords became wind and shattered shields, and light surged out. The paths of each element remained in the air, creating a giant flower blossoming around the two of them as they spun around.

But Unturning Centipede increased its number of attacks. She had attacked with great frequency already, but now that they had moved closer together...

“...!”

Her attacks changed. Before, she had struck with her mandible swords from the left and right, but now she sent them straight ahead as well.

One appeared in front of her, then some appeared on either side, and finally another appeared in front.

“————”

She established a series of high-speed attacks from three directions.

She launched them like a rapid-fire cannon.

Front, right, right, front, right, left, front, right, and right. The repeated attacks rushed out and sliced through the wind.

But the half-dragon fought back. He hit his shields out front as well as on the left and right for his own three-layers of attack.

Right, left, front, right, right, front, right, left, front, right, right, and front. He attacked faster than he breathed and forced his way ahead. However...

“Urquiaga...-kun!”

Suzu’s yell reached him.

“She’s capturing...you!”

Suzu sensed it. She sensed it clearly. She sensed the beauty come to a stop.

Unlike with the previous actions, she rapidly came to understand the shape and number of the beauty the two combatants had created.

She knew why without having to think about it. It was the same. After Narumi launched her blade through the center, she made a certain attack on Urquiaga.

...Front, right, right, front, right, left...

There was a pattern. It was hard to notice because she would end the pattern after a bit and begin again from a different position, but Suzu thought there was a reason for the repetition. After all...

...It makes Urquiaga-kun attack on the right a lot!

The pattern led Urquiaga to swing his right arm a lot and there were two reasons for that.

A solid sound pointed to the first reason.

It was the sound of a shield attack pushed by his right arm powerfully deflecting Narumi’s mandible sword.

But that had been set up. The sword was blown away with no resistance and Urquiaga's right arm thrust forward with the shield.

His right arm was wide open as it stretched forward. That was one of the reasons for this, and the other...

"The...hammer..."

By repeating the same actions, Narumi was able to predict the timing of the sixteen striking weapons. She instantly grabbed the sixteen weapons in her own arms. In the sixteen additional arms she summoned, that is.

And then she grabbed Urquiaga's right arm in her left arm.

Urquiaga tried to pull back, but Narumi repeatedly summoned new arms to grab it.

She held it in place.

A moment later, sixteen hammers and three hooked swords slammed into Urquiaga.

Narumi did not stop. This was an official duel. Holding back would be impolite, so this was expected of her.

And if she could completely crush this opponent, he would likely be able to find resolution and resignation over a number of things. And the same was true of her. So...

"This ends now!"

She sent out her blunt and bladed strikes with a time delay between them. And she knew her own left arm would be caught in the flurry of blows. She could not defeat this opponent otherwise.

The half-dragon raised his left arm. He was not striking her. He made a shield attack on the hooked sword. He had likely judged them more dangerous than the hammers.

A moment later, the hooked blade collided with the spell shield he held out.

The shield broke, shattered, and vanished. The brass heels dropped down

beyond the scattering light.

“This is over!!”

But Narumi received an unexpected attack.

What she sensed in front of her was a definite explosion.

...What!?

She did not have time to dodge. The fog and impact of pressure exploded and struck her entire body.

Suzu sensed it.

...He flew...?

It was Urquiaga. He had opened only the thrusters on the front of his right half.

“————!!”

And he blasted his power of flight toward Narumi at extreme close range.

It was noise, heat, and power. That acceleration allowed a half-dragon to fly. If he was a true dragon, that explosive power would be released from the mouth as a dragon cannon. He had used up the contents of his lungs and slammed it into his opponent.

It was true Urquiaga had been moving closer and closer to his opponent.

All of his footwork and movements had likely been to fill his thruster lungs with ether.

Suzu also understood why he had not used his left arm. The thrusters on his left half were not open. That preserved the acceleration of his left lungs but also prevented the power released from his right side from escaping through the opposite side. That sent its full power toward his opponent.

It was an explosion.

Narumi's left arm detached from the shoulder, flew away, and stabbed into

the ceiling. Her entire body bent as if from a blow to the right side, but...

“Kh...!”

Her right arm and both legs were detached from their bases and new ones were summoned. She also re-summoned her left arm.

It only took an instant for her to land, but Urquiaga used that time to charge forward.

“Here I go!”

He accelerated his powerful left arm.

Narumi’s mind grew clear within the speed and decisions.

After the impact of the explosion, Unturning Centipede made an immediate adjustment. That was partially due to her mind clearing, but more than that...

...I can’t afford to lose!

She was Date’s Vice Chancellor. And she had Masamune as her Chancellor.

Masamune was effectively imprisoned by the Seiryu, but that led from her own decision.

It had happened three weeks ago.

When Hashiba had arrived to confirm they were following the history recreation, Masamune’s brother Kojirou had felt he was duty-bound to commit suicide. He had not let it show, but the result had become apparent soon enough. A few days later, Kojirou had attempted suicide in an unused tea room within Sendai Castle.

Masamune and Narumi had been worried and gone to search for him, so they had been the first to discover him.

He had inherited a dragon’s power. He had used an Orei Metallo blade, but it had not been strong enough. So as they attempted to rescue him, he had made a request.

He had asked them to act on Date’s behalf.

Masamune and Narumi were both name-inheritors. What would happen if they stopped Kojirou from carrying out his history recreation? And that was when Hashiba had arrived in Kantou to check on the history recreation.

Masamune had been the one to act. The Testament descriptions mentioned a theory that she had been the one to do it, so she had figured Hashiba could not complain. And so she had taken her own brother's life.

Narumi still wondered if she should have done it instead.

She wondered if it was her failure to do so that had allowed Masamune to be imprisoned by the Seiryu and to lose her memories.

If she had taken Kojirou's life, Masamune may have shunned her, but that would not have harmed Date and they could have cooperated with Musashi. So...

"Let me tell you something!"

Narumi moved and thought. She thought while sending out her right arm to block the half-dragon's left thrust.

"I lost my arms and legs as a child when Masamune accidentally summoned the Seiryu! It was when we were training together and I made her cry..."

She said it.

"She was never able to summon it afterwards! But now she can summon it again! ...These are my bonds! This is the punishment I must accept!!"

Narumi thought while summoning a mandible sword into her left arm.

...What good did Kojirou's death do for Date?

They had followed history, so it had helped on a political and foreign front, but in the resisting land of Oushuu, everyone was like family and they all lived with no concern for race.

"Answer me...!"

Musashi. Future rulers of the Far East.

Have we failed? Will I only ever feel regret? And are Masamune and all the others nothing more than a lost cause now?

We don't know our destiny. We only view the Testament as something to use if it will benefit us. We all huddled together in the cold only wishing happiness for ourselves and our comrades.

I must leave Date, but can I retrieve everything for Date before then?

...!...!

In search of an answer, Narumi slammed her opened right hand toward the end of the charging half-dragon's forearm.

To settle things for herself once more, she defended with a rapid and repeated re-summoning of her hand.

Narumi repeatedly re-summoned her right wrist and hand. Her opened hand struck his hand. If it was deflected, she would immediately summon the next hand.

By repeating the process countless times in rapid succession, she could fully stop an opponent's attack.

This was not the same as before. She had used a finger before. This time, it was her palm. She could distribute his striking force more than before and she could grab onto him once she did stop him.

To turn that around, he would likely create an explosion with his left thrusters.

But she would not fall for that a second time around. She only had to prepare for a repeated summoning and immediately summon her limbs afterwards. And once she endured his thruster explosion, he would remain before her with no acceleration left.

Once she grabbed him, she could handle an opponent who was nothing but strength.

So Narumi stopped him. She did not hold back in re-summoning her hand to stop him. And...

"...?"

She suddenly felt something wrong about her right arm.

Wondering what it was, she visually checked within the high speed. She found her right arm was breaking.

...*Eh?*

She was letting it be deflected as she stopped him, but that was not the cause.

The palm was *being broken*. Then her wrist and forearm were also *being destroyed* by his left arm.

Her continuous defense had not stopped him. As her arm shattered...

“Ohhhhhh!”

She did not understand. This should have stopped him. And yet he was approaching. So she took a half step back while summoning a whole new right arm.

“Wha-...?”

While expressing her confusion, Narumi thrust her right arm toward him.

She continued her defense through continuous re-summoning while trying to block his approaching left arm.

“————”

But it was broken again. The continuous summoning was occurring, and yet...

...*Why!?*

Her question was immediately answered through her vision.

The thrusters on his left half were all open, but he had not used them all at once.

Each of them was producing an intermittent barrage of acceleration. It was...

...*Continuous acceleration!?*

Narumi realized what he was trying to do and what he had accomplished. When the half-dragon had known she was going to use her continuous re-summoning defense, he had tasked himself with matching his acceleration to

those summonings.

When his speed was blocked and reduced, he immediately reapplied it. And that rapid-fire acceleration was not just coming from his arm. It came from across his left half. His shoulder, side, hip, and leg blasted in order like a wind instrument.

His speed could not keep up with her continuous re-summoning.

But Narumi knew that his strength was greater.

The half-dragon approached by making up for his inferior speed with his strength.

Narumi's right arm broke. The continuous summoning defense was meaningless at this point. It would not work on this half-dragon. But that continuous acceleration with his left side would have used up the ether inside him.

He could no longer use his thrusters.

That meant he could no longer move. He was only rushing forward on inertia. But...

"The centipede's mandible survived!!"

Narumi held a mandible sword in her left hand, so she swung it diagonally down toward him as he charged in.

A moment later, she heard his voice.

"Let us speak, Date Narumi."

Then something impossible came from his arms as they reached hers.

A thruster explosion burst out from his arms.

Suzu sensed the end of the battle.

Her first impression was that the noise was incredible. But...

...That was...

Urquiaga had produced a second thruster explosion. He had used both arms

for it, which should have been impossible after using up his ether. That was why Narumi had been hit without even trying to defend. But...

“————”

Suzu felt it on her hand.

There was a somewhat cold but definite current to the air.

It was ether.

A wave of ether was beginning to flow toward them from the Seiryu's gate behind Masamune.

That was what had supported Urquiaga's second thruster explosion. He had taken in the Seiryu's ether and used it to settle things.

The battle was over.

Fog was probably whirling through the center of the hall. Suzu sensed fog as a temperature difference, but she had been told it was hard to see through.

In that case, the others would be unable to see the two who currently stood in the center of the hall.

Suzu placed her hands on her cheeks as she sensed the two of them.

...Narumi-san...

Narumi had lost both arms and legs. They had been blown off by the explosive blast. And then Urquiaga pushed her to the floor.

“Date Narumi.”

He spoke quietly within the whirling wind.

“Open up. I wish to speak with you.”

“You idiot...”

Narumi cried in the darkness.

Unturning Centipede was making adjustments after the extreme close-range blast, but she had not approved it. So it did not activate or open. And...

“You idiooooot...”

She inhaled and could not wipe the tears from her cheeks, so she simply cried.

It's over. It's over for me. I couldn't save Masamune and I couldn't act as a shield for Date as Vice Chancellor. I failed. I really failed. When was it I failed? It must have been back when we lost Kojirou.

“Ah...!”

I'm sorry, she apologized in her heart. She apologized to Masamune, Kojirou, and everyone else for her inability to do anything. The tears spilled not just onto her cheeks but to her hair as well. She arched her back while lying limbless on the floor.

“No...”

She felt regret. And she felt pathetic. That regret opened her mouth and brought out her voice. But...

“Date Narumi!”

A sudden impact reached her throat.

...!?

It was an unrestrained strike.

“Damn, does this not have a weakness on the throat?”

He was trying to open Unturning Centipede's armor. She could hear and feel his hard hands touching her chest, stomach, and neck.

“You...”

Idiot, she thought. She could not move at the moment.

Her face was likely red from crying.

She had lost. And he was trying to force her out instead of letting her wallow in defeat.

“Are you okay?”

Only once he asked that did she realize he was worried about her.

...You idiot.

Hadn't they just been fighting? She was fine since she had Unturning Centipede, but he was different. He should have been worried about himself first and foremost, but...

"Kh..."

She had utterly lost. Countless thoughts mixed together in her head and she had no idea what she should do. She had to worry about Date and Masamune, but his concern stung the most because it seemed to take advantage of those weaknesses.

But then he grew more forceful. While she lay on her back, he lifted up her lower chest armor.

"I shall open it."

And he did.

At the bottom of the thin darkness, the ether wind and wave passed by and the fog hid Urquiaga as Narumi finally came into view.

Inside the opened Unturning Centipede, a girl lay on her back, unable to move.

Tears wet her face, her hair was disheveled, and her red dress fluttered from her heavy breathing. But her teary eyes were looking up at him.

"Wh...what do you want?"

"Judge. Date Narumi... I have something to tell you."

This situation finally allowed him to say what he had been thinking the entire time.

"Date Narumi. ...I love you."

So...

"Come to Musashi. Then we can save the world together."

...Eh?

A giant blank filled Narumi's mind.

She did not understand what he meant. Even so, her tears stopped and heat gathered in her face.

"W-wait..."

Once she gulped. Her trembling voice gained a different sort of tremor. Instead of the weak strength brought by her tears, it was the tense strength of not knowing what was going to happen. She clicked her teeth together and all thought vanished from her mind.

"But, um, you were always talking about elder sisters..."

"Not to worry. I looked you up in the almanac and your birthday is June 21."

"Wh-what good is knowing that?"

"You don't get it?" asked the half-dragon. "My birthday is September 7. ...If we married and became family, I would be your husband and younger brother. That means you just need to marry me and become my elder sister."

Narumi had a thought and she put it to words.

"I'm pretty sure that means you're insane, but it doesn't surprise me at this point. ...But since when?"

"Since you arrived as a diplomat. But I knew a girl like you would only fight back if I played this simply. Heh. So I used Masamune as bait and pretended to be a tsundere in order to approach you. But it all goes back to when I first saw you. Do you remember what I said then?"

She did. He had seen her and asked if she was an elder sister.

But it had likely already begun by that point. The fact that he even asked meant one thing.

...If I had been an elder sister, that would have settled it for him?

"Why?"

“I felt you were beautiful.”

“How!? I have all these prosthetics thanks to an old mistake and I was wearing this mobile shell...”

“That is exactly why, Date Narumi. Half-dragons have no interest in weak creatures. We like someone who is strong, someone who is noble, and...if I am being greedy, someone who wears cool armor. And if I am being even greedier...someone who inspires predatory desire with the softness inside that armor.”

He reached for her dress.

“I shall take a look.”

She had lost, so she saw no meaning in opposing it. So...



“If you had asked permission, it only would have angered me.”

No words answered her. He simply tore her dress away.

He exposed her.

Narumi’s honest opinion was that she felt cold.

Unturning Centipede was her bed, her prosthetics were her bonds, and what remained of her body was exposed to him. Not only did she have nothing to cover herself with, she even lacked arms to cover herself and could not so much as twist her body around. Her mouth trembled, tears welled up in her eyes, and heat filled not just her cheeks but her neck and chest as well, but she still feigned strength.

“Beautiful, aren’t I...?”

How much easier would it be if he said no? She could settle on that view of herself and continue to act as she was. But...

“You are indeed beautiful, Date Narumi. ...Even the history recreation sometimes does some good.”

So...

“Come to Musashi, Date Narumi. I would not want anyone else.”

“D-don’t be stupid! I’m Date’s-...!”

“But the history recreation has you running away, does it not?”

No. That was not the point. That was not enough for her.

“I have the Seiryu and Masamune to deal with!”

“Judge. I see. Then,” he said. “If we deal with that, you can come with me. ... Very well. The two of us shall slay the Seiryu.”

Those were the words she had hoped to hear. And yet...

“You idiot. You’re from Musashi, so if you get involved in this...”

“What are you talking about? If we defeat the Seiryu, you will become a resident of Musashi, will you not? And with the Seiryu gone, Date can cooperate with Musashi. That is what matters. Or am I wrong?”

It was a forceful argument, but Narumi suddenly realized something.

Shimmering heat was rising from the thrusters across his body.

He was also shining. So...

...That's right.

She did not know what would happen, but...

"Can you see me as someone who hasn't failed yet?"

"Believe in me, Date Narumi," he said. "Nothing has begun between the two of us yet. ...I will take you back to Musashi. You will solve Date's problems. Everything will succeed from now on. And then it can begin. That is what this is."

"Then what am I supposed to do now?"

"Decide how you are going to say goodbye to your friends in Date. Also..."

He awkwardly tried to push her chest armor back together.

"The fog will clear soon. It would be a shame to let the others see, so tell me how to close this."

"...You idiot."

A bitter laugh escaped and the remaining tears fell from her eyes.

But there was no tremor in her lungs as she inhaled.

I failed, she thought. But...

...God, please give me the chance to make up for it.

Someone befitting of prayer stood by her side. She felt relief in that fact and then she spoke.

"Unturning Centipede. Reactivate."

Suzu felt her own heat in the hands on her cheeks.

...I-I heard all that!

That was incredible, she thought.

Vice President: “Suzu! What’s going on there!?”

“Right,” agreed Suzu. There was a lot she wanted to say: Thank goodness, it’s okay, let’s do our best, *etc.* All of those words filled her heart, but...

“—————”

Suzu sensed something.

Bell: “Masa...zu...mi.”

Vice President: “What is it?”

She could tell the two people were slowly standing up.

One was a half-dragon and the other was Unturning Centipede.

They got up side by side and faced the same direction.

They faced the source of the ether wind. Something had finally appeared on that end of the hall.

...The Seiryu!

An alarm sounded. It indicated danger within Sendai Castle. It had sounded in the main garden the night before and Suzu could tell the level of danger had grown. But...

Bell: “It’s okay.”

Vice President: “Is it?”

Masazumi no longer asked what was going on. And...

Me: “Hey, Uqui. You havin’ a good time?”

Uqui: “Judge. A very fulfilling time. This world undoubtedly exists for Narumi and me at the moment. After all...”

He said it.

Uqui: “No matter what we do, it is our turn to act.”

Me: “You can do something?”

Uqui: “Have you forgotten that I used one final spurt to guide us to the top during last year’s Far Eastern Inter-Academy Porn Game Championship? Hm?”

Me: “That’s just because you’d let the non-elder sister characters build up too far.”

“But anyway,” he said.

Me: “Take care of this one. Go save Date. Oh, and you keep up the good work too, Bell-san.”

Bell: “Right.”

As soon as Suzu nodded, several figures appeared around her.

They were all armed and they faced her.

Vice President: “What is it, Mukai?”

Bell: “It’s okay.”

When she said that and nodded, the surrounding people lowered their heads in response. Then the man who stepped out front spoke.

“Musashi Ambassador. Last night, you must have perceived the Seiryu’s violent pressure from up close. Could you guide us?”

“Then...can we go...together?”

“Testament.”

Suzu sensed a slight tremor in the immediate response, but she shook her head. Going with them would hold them back in some ways, but...

“I can guide you...more accurately that way...maybe.”

She could not help but lose her confidence at the end, but everyone around her exchanged a glance and finally nodded.

“We are honored to be guided by the Musashi’s Acting Captain who has commanded and protected such a giant ship ever since the Armada battle.”

“Eh?”

She had not done anything so impressive.

Bell: “Th-they mean *that*...right? I-I was just...reading the movements of the... wind and other ships...reading, um...what they would do...and moving that model...around.”

Musashino: “To provide some supplementary information, Suzu-sama’s standard margin of error while commanding the ship’s movements during gravitational cruising is around 27 cm. ...And embarrassingly enough, her allowance for that kind of fuzziness...well, without her, we would have been blown away around three times by now. Over.”

Asakusa: “That is correct, Suzu-sama. To be blunt, anyone except for Neshinbara-sama and Toori-sama would increase our odds of survival, so having someone act in that role is meaningful. Plus, you have shown the results mentioned by ‘Musashino’, so it is an impressive accomplishment. Over.”

Novice: “You pretty clearly rejected my very personality there, didn’t you!? Didn’t you!?”

Four Eyes: “Don’t pretend you’re not happy. You just like it when people pay attention to you.”

Suzu did not quite understand, but apparently what she always did was helpful. She decided she needed to continue doing it as best as she could.

Then Urquiaga’s voice reached her.

“Now, how should we settle this?”

Unturning Centipede answered him as her sight devices lit their auxiliary lights.

“Musashi Acting Captain, you secure Masamune. As for us...”

Suzu heard Narumi’s voice.

“We will calm the Seiryu.”

Narumi’s anti-Seiryu plan was clear.

“We just have to beat it down.”

“You mean teach it who its master is?”

“You can view it like that if you want. Our 2nd Special Duty Officer and I already calmed it twice yesterday. Its damage is clear and its weakness on the throat has been destroyed. If we can show that its power has no effect and if

we can weaken it,” said Narumi, “then control should shift to Masamune.”

“And if it continues to oppose us?”

“Then we’ll have to destroy it. And of course we have the perfect opportunity to do that since it’s damaged,” explained Narumi. “But this is an injured beast we’re dealing with.”

“I have not overlooked that, so do not worry. Our opponent is injured and I am at the pinnacle of my life’s happiness. ...It’s obvious which one of us is stronger. Even if this god of war is trying to expand its power due to some kind of complex, we are the real winners here. This battle has already been decided!”

“That’s some wonderful logic. ...Why not go out ahead and prove it?”

“Judge. Then follow me.”

The half-dragon took a step forward. Narumi smiled bitterly when she saw it.

...Honestly.

The soldiers surrounding Musashi’s ambassador gave them an “eh?” look.

None of them had expected him to actually “go” after that.

How naïve of them.

“Let’s go, everyone.”

She said that and came to understand something.

This half-dragon’s suddenness had to be a constant thing for him. After all, she had seen the words of Musashi’s Chancellor and President on the sign frame he was using.

...“Go save Date”, hm?

They were treating Date’s problems as something someone could simply head out and deal with.

But at this point, she did not feel like telling him to take this seriously. And she recalled something else. When they had met on the diplomatic ship the day before, the half-dragon had said something on the deck.

He had commented on the Date clan at the time.

“A land of mere decoration...hm?”

That was right.

They were trapped by so much, unable to do what they had to, and ultimately bound by themselves.

But he could ignore the decorations, look at the essence of the issues, and act without worrying about those bonds. So...

“He can just go save us, can he?”

That was not bad.

That's right, thought Narumi within the blowing ether wind.

She had to keep the mindset of someone intent to leave Date.

...So instead of looking at Date's problems from within, I need to face them head on.

What did she need to do now? That was simple.

“Defeat the Seiryu.”

As the alarm sounded, the Seiryu's upper body appeared behind Masamune and the throne. Its armor's self-healing had not acted in time, so its throat scales were still damaged.

It would be dangerous for it to open the ether gate and step out. Based on Katakura's reasoning...

“The Seiryu intends to secure Masamune. It may pull her back into the ether gate and then they will never appear again.”

“...Hey.”

“What?”

“Judge,” nodded the half-dragon. “Who was it that forced that dangerous god of war onto Masamune? ...Talk about a failed project.”

“Huh? Yoshiaki-san, I'm looking at the Date clan's commentary and their Vice

President is going nuts, but why are you averting your gaze? ...Eh? Did I say something harsh?"

"Vassal, I don't think I can bear any more of your innocent questions..."

"Just to be clear, Principal Yoshihime agreed to it."

"If it was a parental decision, then there is no helping it. ...Even Catholicism says to face the trials presented to us," he said. "And now is the time to face a trial."

"Testament," agreed Narumi.

They would defeat the rampaging dragon. They would defeat and calm the Seiryu.

She did not need to think about anything else.

The Seiryu was trying to move further forward into the hall.

It was likely trying to secure Masamune to receive a definite ether supply from her.

She needed to stop that. She needed to break and calm the Seiryu.

And of course, the Seiryu would try to prevent that. So...

"———"

Bluish-white light began to trail through the sky. The Seiryu's River was beginning to show its effects. The hall would soon be filled with the violent pressure of rushing lightning. So...

"Let's go."

Musashi's ambassador seemed ready too. They were slower than Narumi and the half-dragon, but the commander in the lead raised a hand toward her to say they were ready to go.

They were only about 70 meters away. An ether wind had already formed and the lightning was creating electrical discharges. But...

"———!"

The two of them matched their breathing without speaking a word.

As the half-dragon took the first step and ran straight ahead...

“ ... ”

Narumi no longer hesitated to use her full strength in an unturning charge.

Chapter 77: Dragon Owner of the Riverside

第七十七章

『川縁の宿竜』

誰もがぎっど
望んでる事を
躊躇う事無く
秘は選ぶ
配点 (別れ)

Without hesitation

I choose

That which

Everyone surely wants

Point Allocation (Parting)

Suzu advanced through the raging wind. The Date warriors raised spell shields around her.

“Musashi Ambassador!”

“...Right!”

She answered their question by pointing her finger.

She indicated where the dragon’s power was weakest. But...

...Where they can reach...Masamune-san.

“Do your...best!”

“Sure thing!”

They all held their spell shields forward to part the wind, but the wind had the force of water now and each step forward was like trudging through a bog.

It was bad enough for Suzu under all their protection, so how much greater was the pressure for them outside it? She mostly knew the answer thanks to her senses, but...

“Please...!”

They had to secure Masamune. If the Seiryu came out and took her away, it would all be over.

Narumi and Urquiaga were also trying to grab Masamune if they saw an opening, but...

“...Watch out!”

The Seiryu would abandon its pressure in other areas in order to protect

Masamune. Its current of pressure, its roar, and its lightning attacks which were taking form all mercilessly assaulted Urquiaga and Narumi when they tried to get close.

That meant Suzu and the Date warriors had to do it.

Their plan was to split into three groups once they were within twenty meters of Masamune. Narumi and Urquiaga would support them, and...

...W-we see who can...get there first!

They continued on.

“Hurry! The Vice Chancellor is protecting us!”

That was exactly right. Urquiaga and Narumi had already arrived near the Seiryu and were dodging attacks. The Seiryu used violent pressure, roars, and lightning attacks, while those two...

...Cancel it out with their swords and strikes!

They likely intended to secure some level of safety before Suzu’s group arrived within the violent wind.

Urquiaga’s front arms and spell charms shattered the pressure and lightning and Narumi summoned several mandible swords in quick succession to shatter and slice any that tried to circle around.

As for the Seiryu...

“...!”

It pushed everything away with a roar and tried to move forward. But...

“An excellent voice! But you can cry louder than that, can’t you!?”

Urquiaga broke through the dragon’s voice pressure with a strike from his front arm. The pressure burst in every direction like a popping bubble and it tore into the ceiling, floor, and walls. But...

“Execution Site Transformation!!”

Urquiaga placed Holy Spell charms in the explosive pressure.

The charms were carried away by the wind, but they were double charms that

included a defense charm which prevented them from being torn by the bursting air. To Suzu's senses, they felt like pieces of wood that were not shaken by the wind.

By letting them ride the violent pressure and lightning, they were pasted to the walls, ceiling, and floor. And...

...They're solidifying?

Their surroundings were indeed "set" in place. The crumbling joints were repaired and solid footing appeared.

Urquiaga had used a similar countermeasure when the Seiryu had destroyed the main garden the night before. Since the dragon would destroy its surroundings with its mere presence, no one would be able to fight back unless they sealed it away as soon as possible. But...

...This puts a big burden...on Urquiaga-kun, doesn't it?

Just as Suzu thought that, something rose up in front of her as she tried to advance through the great pressure.

It was one of Narumi's mandible swords.

The three meter blade was not being used to attack. Several of them were stabbed into the floor and ceiling. They emitted heated ether as the spell carved into the blade activated. And...

...It's hardening...the floor?

That was the same as Urquiaga's spell. Urquiaga's was a Holy Spell while Narumi's was a Far Eastern one. The mandible swords revealed their power through heat as more and more of them were stabbed into the hall like fasteners. They were primarily placed in front of Suzu, as if to create a path to the Seiryu.

After the previous night's battle, Narumi had likely put together her own countermeasure against the Seiryu. And...

...They're similar.

Suzu could not guess why Urquiaga had prepared this when he was an outsider, nor could she guess why Narumi's was so similar to his.

But it did tell her that nothing that had happened had been for naught.

Her group was about to reach the twenty meter mark.

And just as she was thinking they needed to prepare to split up...

“Get down!!”

Narumi’s shout reached them via a sign frame that appeared in front of them.
And a moment later...

...*Wah!*

Suzu sensed a thunderstorm. It was thick and primarily made up of horizontal lightning and rain, just like when the Musashi entered a thundercloud along its path.

It rushed in.

More than gather together, the lightning attacks created a multi-layer curtain as they swept across the hall.

As the Seiryu’s roar cascaded out, the bluish-white lightning rushed out from above Masamune who sat unconscious in the throne.

It instantly formed several dozen side-by-side rows and collided one after another with anyone who approached Masamune.

The light never faded, the roaring never ceased, and countless light sources shook the hall as they burst endlessly. The charms the half-dragon had placed in the gaps had already burned away and the centipede’s blades were mostly broken.

As a result, the hall lost most of its fastener spells.

“———!!”

The Seiryu’s voice shook the hall like a physical blow.

Sendai Castle’s hall was permeated with vibrations.

The stone walls shook and began to crumble.

“Stop that, stupid!!”

After Katakura’s shout, a straight line of sign frames stopped it. They were fine-tuned for the lightning racing through the floor, ceiling, and air, so the distorting room snapped back into shape.

The distortion began anew due to the Seiryu’s roar, but...

“I can stop half of it! So go!!”

Defense barriers, vibrations, and lightning collided along every surface and in the air. It all burst into light, but they were all immediately replenished for another collision.

Every last part of the hall was filled with scattering light.

But two people were breaking through that light.

In the lightning-filled air, Unturning Centipede and the half-dragon were protected by multiple defense barriers like they were heavy armor. The centipede drew several mandible swords and the half dragon pulled out large metal rods that were meant to smash largescale spiritual hazards.

“Where did you even pull those from?”

“God’s hand can be found anywhere. You didn’t know that?”

The half-dragon calmly answered the centipede’s question and raised the three-meter metal rods like they were twin swords. And...

“Mukai and the others have arrived down below. Let’s end this.”

“As a holy man, can’t you ask your god to grant us victory?”

“I could indeed. Listen up, everyone!” said the half-dragon. “We are more than capable of handling this without doing that.”

“—————”

“Don’t you have something to say?”

He received a response from below.

“Testament! We are more than capable of handling this!!”

“True,” agreed the centipede. “I’ll at least remember to thank the

Testament.”

“Very good. The Testament has helped us out a fair bit as well. ...Now, let’s go.”

The half-dragon took a light step in midair.

He stepped to the right.

At the same time, Unturning Centipede stepped to the left.

They both lightly raised a hand.

“Okay.”

With that, they used their second step to clash with the Seiryu at full speed.

Suzu advanced.

She had been walking forward this entire time. Her body had been wrapped in tension, her breaths had been deep, and she had focused on keeping her legs moving. But that was about to change. From here on, she was not following a path forward. She was following the path to approach Masamune.

“Oh,” said someone nearby. “Ohh,” replied someone else.

The Date warriors had split into three groups and each one approached the throne along a different path.

But the Seiryu was right in front of them. It was roaring. The dragon had likely been roaring in anger ever since it first became self-aware.

That did not matter.

It had nothing but power. It did not know what to do about its own existence. It thought it could overcome anything just by wielding its power and it roared. But they only had to restore it all to Masamune.

There was no need to sympathize with the dragon.

After all, that dragon had somewhere to go: Masamune.

The night before, Masamune had taken Suzu’s hand and pulled on it.

She had looked up at the cherry trees surrounded by fireflies and told Suzu all

about the colors.

So if the dragon could be restored to her, she would surely be able to look up at the dragon and tell Suzu all about its power.

So Suzu advanced.

Two powers clashed with the Seiryu up above. As Suzu and the warriors worked to retrieve Masamune, Urquiaga and Narumi prevented the Seiryu from coming out into the hall. And they did it by...

...Colliding with its arms!

Unturning Centipede and Urquiaga each slammed their weapons into one of the Seiryu's arms.

Like blades locked together, sparks and a grinding sound scattered and the two attackers were knocked back several dozen meters.

"...!!"

They also blocked the Seiryu's hands as it occasionally swung them like fists instead of just pushing. Each time, a metallic sound filled the hall, but...

"Ohhhh!"

The two of them spread the Seiryu's arms to the side, leaving Masamune undefended in the center.

"Hurry...!"

Suzu moved forward. She moved forward along with the others. At the bottom of the wind, they charged into the center of the dragon's power.

She arrived at the bottom of the dais. She was only a few more steps away from Masamune who sat slumped in the throne.

"————"

That was when Suzu sensed the Seiryu's arms spread to either side.

Urquiaga and Narumi had definitely pushed them back, but the action was more like opening its chest and...

...Breathing...in?

It was the lead-in to a roar of explosive pressure. Suzu remembered when this had been fired again and again in the main garden the night before. Instead of a mere wave of ether, this roar attack was the Seiryu's dragon cannon.

And the one about to be released was most likely especially powerful.

"Get down...!"

Then it arrived. The Seiryu was clearly focused on her and the others standing in front of it.

"————!!!"

The roar exploded.

The air in front of the Seiryu dissipated in an instant. The elements in the air broke apart, electrical discharges and fog appeared, and that very moisture was entirely scattered by the shockwave.

All of the motion was controlled by ether. The Seiryu's roar was a lot like an ether cannon and it spread a wave of impacting ether across a fan shape in front of the dragon. Everything that existed there was hit.

The Seiryu's target was the people who had arrived at its feet.

They were too close.

They could not escape a direct hit. And that seemed to be why the Seiryu opened its throat even wider, as if to catch everything in the blast and erase it all.

"————"

It roared.

That roar collided with and destroyed everything.

At the same time, something stood in front of the Seiryu. It was not a person. It was larger and only a head shorter than the Seiryu.

But it was not a god of war.

"Hey...!"

It was a collection of defense barriers. They were designed to block impacts rather than lightning. They had also been remade to reflect those impacts, they were stacked thickly together, and they formed a giant humanoid shape.

Katakura had constructed this humanoid defense barrier.

The humanoid defense barrier slammed its right arm straight into the explosive roar. The defense barrier arm was shaped like a rectangular pillar and it shattered when it hit the explosive pressure, but...

“I’ll block this...!”

The roar split apart. The ether pressure burst as if devouring the humanoid defense barrier. Of course, the one arm was not enough to cover the entire blast, so it struck the surrounding floor and walls. But...

“Diiiiive!!”

Just as the arm fully shattered, the humanoid defense barrier jumped right into the explosive pressure.

There were as many sounds of impact as there were defense barriers and they grew into a downpour of blows. The great number of defense barriers burst into light and the explosive roar was scattered in every direction along with it. As a result...

“...!”

The core of the explosive roar was consumed and erased.

“Yes!” someone shouted. Now they could move forward. They could reach Masamune. But...

“Watch...out!!”

Right after Suzu’s shout, the great blue form pulled its legs out from the ether gate.

The gate closed behind it.

The Seiryu had made up its mind. It would no longer run away and it would settle this here. It had decided to make Masamune its own.

With its mind made up, it shook the floor as it stepped forward. It forced its way forward after being pushed back with its arms spread outwards.

The dragon roared and placed its feet on the floor.

“...!!”

The Seiryu swung its arms to knock the centipede and half-dragon away. Sparks flew and wind blew as those two bodies of resistance were torn away. And...

“———!”

This time, it took a true step.

The Seiryu saw its master down below.

That was the source of its power as well as the master meant to use its power. To acquire that person and complete itself, the Seiryu thrust its arms forward.

Its movements were awkward as it sliced through the wind to forcibly grab Masamune, but it still tried to grab its master in an embrace as if that were the only way.

In that moment, the deflected centipede raised her voice as she was slammed against the wall.

“Rusu-san!!”

With that yell, the hall transformed.

The front wall of Sendai Castle was torn away by an explosion.

The night sky came into view and Rusu, Sendai Castle’s control system, spoke.

“Emergency purge of external wall and internal armor complete!!”

Urquiaga thought the hall’s air had exploded.

The dragon’s roar and the influx of ether had increased the hall’s internal pressure, but now the external wall had been removed. The difference in air

pressure and ether density threw everything outside.

They had planned for this, so it was not a problem for them. They had wind-resistance barrier spells and this much wind was well within what a half-dragon could handle. Even if someone was blown outside, they had fall assistance spells in place.

The Seiryu was no different. It was a massive god of war and it had the strength needed to resist the explosive pressure.

However, the Seiryu had just leaned forward to grab Masamune.

The forceful torrent of air knocked the Seiryu forward a step. And that caused it to step over Masamune.

Urquiaga decided this was an opening, so he raised his voice.

“Mukai! Go!!”

Just before Urquiaga urged her forward, Suzu had not understood her current situation.

She remembered that the Seiryu had come out and there had been explosive pressure. But at the moment...

...I'm...standing?

No, it was more accurate to say she was being supported while floating in midair. She felt something on her back.

“Are you okay, Musashi’s ambassador cutie? ...Oh, I-I-I-I-I am Sendai Date Academy V-V-Vice President Katakura Kagetsuna! S-sorry, it’s just so rare for me to talk with a real girl that I’m getting really excited! B-b-but I’m not weird. Right? I’m not, right? I’m not weird at all?”

He seems pretty strange, she thought, but compared to everyone in her class...

“I guess you’re...pretty normal.”

“Eh!? Normal! Yes! I’m glad I confessed! Did you see that, guys!? Jealous, aren’t you!? Musashi’s ambassador just certified me as normal! Normal! I’m

normal! That means I don't matter! Ha ha! I'm a worthless human being who doesn't matter... What are those pitying looks for!? ...Anyway cutie, what a worthless guy says is worthless, but listen up!"

"Wh-what is it?"

"Well, can you see up ahead? Can you see Masamune up on the dais?"

She could not see it, but she could perceive it. Masamune was there. The Seiryu had lost its balance and stepped forward, but...

"I...can."

Suzu was blind, but Masamune had pulled on her hand and taught her about the colors.

She had been taught the colors of Masamune's hair, clothing, and eyes. So with her senses...

"I can...see her!"

"Good, then let's do this! You should be able to see the wind. You can sense the ether pressure and everything else. So I'll tell you how to get through there. ...Shut up, all of you! I'm not gonna say a word about her lovely armpits! Not a word about that or how tight they could squeeze something!"

Oh, that sounds like the things they say during the executions in class, thought Suzu. That helped calm her a little.

"Nn."

So she took a step forward.

"Thank...you."

It was likely thanks to Katakura's instructions that she could remain safe. She instructed the people around her and they protected her. So as everyone collapsed and tried to get back up, she did her best to show them she was safe as she boldly walked forward as a diplomat.

"Please."

Suzu pleaded with Katakura.

"Let me go...straight toward her."

Suzu began to walk.

She walked forward as if across a windless and dustless plain.

There was a slight waver in her stance and in where she placed her feet, but each step allowed her to break through the occasional blast of ether pressure while only tilting her head a little.

Her hair whipped behind her. The dragon roared as it tried to regain its position overhead. It produced more wind, but...

“...Nn.”

Suzu broke through it. Katakura’s instructions, her senses, and the sensors she wore were all used to set the warriors in motion as they walked straight ahead.

She placed a foot on the dais.

“Nn.”

She climbed up onto the first step.

Then she continued directly on up to the next step.

Urquiaga resumed fighting while confirming that Mukai was making progress. The Seiryu was moving.

After its large step forward, it had to recover its position. But allowing that would put Mukai in danger. It would also let Masamune be taken. So...

“Narumi!”

He simply called her name and then collided with the Seiryu.

As the Seiryu tried to recover from its step forward...

...The side!

He made a strike from the side to knock it off balance.

His thrust-powered collision targeted the Seiryu’s upper arm on the right side. He raised his weapons as a shield, and...

“...!”

He hit.

Narumi hit at the same moment.

A moment later, the force passed through the Seiryu and they felt a loosening sensation, so they put their hips into it.

“Time to carry you away!”

The Seiryu lost its balance.

It leaned back and tilted to the left. If it collapsed, they would gain plenty of time.

...And have the perfect opening to hit it on the throat again!

That was Narumi’s job, so he had to do the heavy lifting here. But...

“...!?”

Urquiaga saw something out of the corner of his eye. As the Seiryu leaned back, it did two things.

First, it moved the wings on its back instead of its legs to forcibly regain its balance.

Second, it used its backwards leaning position to throw an attack with its left arm. And it was targeting the person behind its right arm.

“Narumi!”

Narumi heard the impact.

Then she felt herself flying through the air.

...I was hit!?

The Seiryu had used its right arm to hide the attack made with its left.

It had been too sudden for her to use her instantaneous and consecutive defenses. After a metallic sound, her vision began to spin, but...

“...Eh?”

She was unhurt. She had spun once through the air, but she had also escaped the Seiryu's attack range.

She was not even scratched. But...

“————”

Someone had been slammed into the wall to the left, breaking the stone.

It was the half-dragon.

Narumi knew what had happened. He had taken the Seiryu's attack and knocked her out of the way.

That was all.

...You idiot...

She had a number of thoughts and several emotions filled her chest, but the Seiryu was getting up. It was trying to step back so it could capture Masamune. So...

“I'm counting on you! ...Oniniwa-san!!”

A moment later, a straight-line collision reached the Seiryu from outside.

It was the heavily-equipped god of war named Sagetsu.

The collision only lasted an instant.

As the Seiryu tried to lean over Suzu and Masamune, a giant god of war had flown in through the hole in the wall behind it.

The god of war was unarmed and it simply collided with the Seiryu to hold it back.

“Making use of an Oni in the very, very end!? Date is such a wild clan!!”

The breaking and cracking armor sounded like a hit to a brass instrument.

Beyond that refreshing sound, the Oni's god of war and the Seiryu crashed into the back wall together.

But the dragon pushed through even that.

It tensed its body, lowered its hips, and then let its arms and hips shoot up to slam the Oni against the floor.

It roared.

This roar's reverberation really did begin the collapse of the hall.

But as it roared and turned around, something had been accomplished.

"Nn."

Suzu had arrived in front of Masamune.

She took Masamune's hand.

Suzu realized Masamune was regaining consciousness.

When she grabbed the girl's hand and held it tightly, Masamune reacted like she was plagued by nightmares. Her voice soon left her lips and her eyelids moved.

"Ah..."

"Masamune-san!"

The situation was approaching its conclusion. The Seiryu's crazed actions were trying to settle this by force.

But Suzu did not fear the approaching Seiryu.

Masamune faced her and asked a question.

"Who-...?"

Before she could say "are you", Suzu raised her voice.

"Don't!!"

Suzu did not even find this odd.

"Don't lie...! Don't forget! You haven't...forgotten, have you...?"

"Forgotten what...?"

"The past! You haven't forgotten the sad things, the unpleasant things, and the...painful things, have you...?"

“What are you talking about!?”

Masamune raised her eyebrows. With the Seiryu approaching behind her, she tried to pull Suzu’s hand off of her own.

But...

“No...!”

Suzu refused to let go. She grabbed on with both hands and held on tight.

“Ah...”

When Masamune felt that strength, her own grip loosened.

That was why Suzu tightened her grip further. She wanted to get through to her. She wanted to return what it was Masamune had told her through her own grip, so she held on tight.

She sent new strength back to the girl. And...

“You remember...don’t you? Last night...in the main...garden...I was surprised when you...touched me without warning...”

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Don’t lie! When we...danced before...you took my hand!”

Suzu remembered. She remembered it clearly.

“It was the...the same strength as when...you pulled on my hand! When you pulled on my hand...on the bridge yesterday...and taught me the colors...of the fireflies, the flowers, the grass, and the trees...!”

“———”

“Don’t say you...forgot about that!!”

She knew Masamune had a painful past. She could not blame the girl for wanting to forget about it.

But, thought Suzu. She mustn’t forget it. After all...

“If you forget...you really will...lose him...”

She had already lost someone important to her, so what would happen if she forgot that? Even if he could live on in her heart...

“You aren’t in the present!” shouted Suzu.

Suzu knew someone who had never forgotten the precious person he had lost and continued to think about them even in the present. He had held great remorse, but he had looked to the present and...

...He stayed with us!!

“What’s wrong with...remorse?”

Because...

“It’s the...proof that...you chose the present!”

“But...!”

Masamune’s face twisted. Her voice did as well and a breath escaped her lips.

“That doesn’t change the fact that I killed Kojirou!!”

That did not matter. Suzu already knew the answer. She knew what to do about someone who was trying to quit indulging in the past and instead arrive at the starting point for living in the present.

That was...

“...Nn.”

She pulled back her hand. Masamune was leaning toward her, so the girl lost her balance.

“Ah...”

It did not matter if she fell. None of it mattered.

There was someone to support her from behind. First, Katakura’s sign frame spoke.

“Chancellor!!”

Then the warriors ran over. Suzu stood out in front of them all as they supported her.

“Don’t...worry.”

She caught and embraced Masamune with the others.

She did not let go. It was more than the hand now. She used her entire body and arms to awkwardly but definitely convey her strength and let the girl know she was here.

“If something...painful happened...then you just have to...make sure that lots...and lots more happy things happen...”

Just like he had.

“You need to...accumulate plenty of happiness...on top of the pain.”

Narumi heard someone crying in the blowing wind.

It was Masamune’s voice. The inheritor of the dragon’s power and Date’s leader was bawling like a baby in the arms of a blind foreign girl who was supported by the others.

“Ah...!!”

It’s over, thought Narumi. *My greatest reason to remain inside Date is over,* she realized in her unturning form.

The half-dragon had yet to move from within the collapsed wall behind her, but she decided to trust that he was fine. She also decided to thank them. And on top of that...

“We will settle this soon.”

Narumi understood that when she saw the Seiryu approaching Masamune and the others.

She had to go at this with everything she had.

She would attack on the left side from her perspective. She could use either hand, but that was the safest position since she was mostly right-handed. So she held a mandible sword in her right hand on the left side of the Seiryu.

There was wind and there was a roar. Where there was pressure there was a current. But...

...It’s been disturbed.

The Seiryu was attacking within that disturbance. However...

“Vice Chancellor!!”

Her comrades resisted atop the collapsing floor. They hardened the floor with spells and fired projectile spells toward the Seiryu.

She had no idea how useful that would be, but this was the end.

This “ending” would determine Date’s future.

“That’s right...”

Narumi’s heart grew clear.

Even the Musashi residents had made the correct decision.

Their 2nd Special Duty Officer managed justice and trials, so he had made the following judgment: Settling this was a job for Date’s Vice Chancellor.

So Narumi stared at the Seiryu.

At first, she looked straight at it. And...

“I’ll be going now.”

She spoke to all of Date and then raced through the air.

Narumi accelerated.

The Seiryu noticed her and leaned its head forward to hide its throat.

“...!”

It roared and spread its wings.

...It’s going to produce its River here!?

Masamune had already regained consciousness, so control should have mostly shifted back to her. But some power must have built up inside it. The dragon was attempting to retrieve Masamune with its own actions.

It was a lot like a child desperately trying to take back a confiscated toy.

But its power could not be denied.

“Ohh...!”

Narumi held a mandible sword up toward the Seiryu and used its pommel to

smash the explosive pressure.

There was a steam explosion and several wispy clouds appeared in the air like white lines. As lightning fired through those, Narumi charged in with a focus on evasion.

She approached the Seiryu and prepared to make her attack as she flew around it and dodged the lightning like a dance.

She twisted her body and – as dozens of lightning strikes approached – she removed her arms and legs while creating a path of legs.

“Kh...!”

She searched for the best striking point, slipped between the lightning bolts, spun around, approached, and passed over attacks.

“...!”

She arrived. She was in front and a bit to the left. From there, she could accelerate and attack simultaneously.

She could do this.

She could pierce the dragon’s throat.

But the Seiryu turned its face toward her. It opened its mouth, and...

“———!!”

It released an explosive roar.

It was the greatest sound yet. It immediately passed the audible range and would soon sweep across the walls, ceiling, and floor as a shockwave that glowed with ether light.

And its nearby right arm had drawn and raised a lightning sword.

The explosive roar had stopped her and the right lightning sword would act as a counterattack.

“In that case...!”

Narumi flew straight in, intending to break through the roar as well as the throat.

A moment later, something changed before her eyes.

The explosive roar suddenly vanished.

No, it had not been annihilated. It concentrated, narrowed down, and left the dragon's throat in a different form.

"A dragon cannon!?"

The ether-based dragon cannon was formed from the same explosive pressure and it fired in a straight line.

All the sound in the air is gone, thought Suzu.

The Seiryu changed...the roar coming from its throat.

...Is that...?

She understood. The Seiryu was trying to protect Masamune. To take her back now that she was trying to leave the past behind, it knew that fighting as a beast would no longer work.

...So it's fighting like the member of...the Four Sacred Beasts it's supposed to be!?

The attack was as sharp as a thrusting spear as it swept through the air.

Two pairs of eyes saw Sendai Castle sliced through from the upper front to the center front. They belonged to Sasuke and Saizou who had just run out of the ramen shop where they were eating dinner.

It looked like an ether cannon had sliced through the night sky from a distance of about three kilometers. But...

"Have you ever seen an ether cannon that can continue firing long enough to look like a solid sword!?"

"You mean other than the one right in front of me here...?"

The two of them walked out with the Kitakata ramen bowls in hand, so they had to nod back toward the manager as he shouted for them to bring back the

bowls.

“Damn.”

“What is it? ...Oh, you can have my pork. I’d just gain weight.”

“Sure thing. It’s just that...maybe we should have stayed in there longer.”

“Testament. ...I can feel my nonexistent blood burning. They’re definitely making history in there.”

“It’s unbearable, isn’t it?” Sasuke smiled bitterly, drank the soup from the bowl, and looked away. “We need to make sure we eventually do that too.”

Suzu could tell the explosive dragon cannon had bisected the top of the hall.

The power was essentially following the Seiryu’s gaze as it swung its head. And it was turning toward Unturning Centipede as she charged straight toward it.

The ceiling was beginning to fall, but Suzu ignored that to look up at Narumi.

“...Watch out!”

Suzu sensed a stone piece of the ceiling falling along Narumi’s path.

And the Seiryu was swinging its head beyond that falling stone.

Normally, the Seiryu would not have made it in time, but the falling stone was in the way. Whether Narumi avoided or broke the stone, the Seiryu’s roar would gain enough time to reach her.

Suzu did not know if the Seiryu had predicted that when it released its roar.

But she noticed Masamune stirring in her arms.

“...Yes.”

The girl spoke quietly.

“I caused you all a lot of trouble. So...I will begin writing some history that can accumulate happiness.”

A girl stood up with tears in the corners of her eyes.

The wind was blowing, the dragon's pressure swept through, and the night sky was exposed in case she felt like stargazing. In that place, she slowly gathered strength in her legs and turned both her eyes toward that night sky. And...

"Thank you."

She spoke to the dragon behind her.

"You protected me and saved me all this time. ...Let's stick together from here on out too."

So...

"As a mutual vow, let's acquire what it is we lack!"

With that, she pulled out a short sword.

And she stabbed the blade into her own right eye.

"Take this as proof from the One-Eyed Dragon!"

She cut through it.

Masamune's action caused the Seiryu's right sight device to be destroyed.

"...!!"

The Seiryu leaned back its head and its right lightning sword stopped moving.

It was receiving feedback from Masamune's actions. That showed how much control had returned to her and it also revealed the weakness on its throat.

"Here goes."

Unturning Centipede drew 37 mandible swords and jammed them all into the dragon's throat.

It was a direct hit.

This blocked up its throat and left the explosive dragon cannon with nowhere to escape, so the Seiryu's chest exploded.

The Seiryu had lost.

...I did it...

As she fell, Narumi used her rear vision to see the Seiryu vanishing into ether light.

The Seiryu had not been annihilated. It was merely moving beyond the ether gate to be sealed inside Masamune's storage dual pitch space.

But things would be very different now. Masamune would no longer be weakened and trapped in the past and the Seiryu would protect her forevermore once its self-healing could complete.

And Narumi saw something else beyond the great quantity of scattering ether light.

...Masamune.

She could only see the girl's back, but Masamune appeared to be crying.

However, she was actually roaring into the emptiness. Blood dripped to her clothing like tears and was swept away by the wind.

"I am Date 'One-Eyed Dragon' Masamune, Conqueror of Oushuu...!"

The girl spoke clearly and loudly.

"This ends my history recreation and completes Hashiba's request!"

That announcement said something about Date's future.

...After Hashiba, we've chosen a future with Matsudaira...

With that thought, Narumi simply let herself fall. Unturning Centipede's fuel gauge had already reached the red danger zone. She would hit the floor and be unable to move in a few seconds, but the vanishing Seiryu and falling ceiling would hide her exit. So...

...I want to get some rest. Maybe grab a cup of sake and some grilled chicken...

She felt a smile on her face.

“...Eh?”

But then something odd happened.

Unturning Centipede’s fall came to a premature stop.

...Eh?

Narumi quickly checked the status display and saw she was 1.53m from the floor. Also...

<Release: Confirmed>

“Eh!?”

She was positioned on her back, so if Unturning Centipede was released now, she would fall onto her back.

But she did not fall.

Someone held her by supporting her back and knees from below.

Within the great quantity of scattering ether light and the thick fog blowing through the air, someone held her in her torn dress.

“You...”

It was not a half-dragon. It was a white-haired boy. He was slender but muscular and he had a slender face. The eyes staring bluntly down at her were golden dragon eyes.

...Eh?

When she widened her eyes and looked him in the eye, she heard a sigh.

“Hm, I seem to have taken in too much Dragon God ether. I don’t look nearly as cool as I usually do.”

The manner of speech and the voice were just like him. Narumi had no idea what was going on.

“Eh!? W-wait just a second. ...Are you telling me there was someone inside there?”

“How rude. You are from Date and you still don’t understand? Surely you

were able to deduce why Masamune was born in a human form despite inheriting your Dragon God's power," he said. "Dragons can take on a human form if the conditions are right. ...Your Principal claims she was impregnated by your Dragon God in some kind of mistake, but that would be a lie. It would have been the result of her having a good time with the local Dragon God in his human form. Her children would never have been born as humans otherwise."

"Then you took on a human form because...?"

"It is partially thanks to taking in the Dragon God ether...but I also felt it was best not to keep any secrets between us. I mean, I did strip you bare earlier..."

So...

"Which do you think is cooler?"

Narumi laughed quietly at that. And...

"I'm pretty sure someone protected me when I made my charge earlier."

"Some people can be very capricious. Idiots don't know how to mind their own business."

"I like the idiot half-dragon."

"Then we'll go with that."

He did. He returned to normal with a single breath and the usual half-dragon was holding her. The sensation on her back and on the back of her knees was harder and colder than before, but...

...I appreciate it.

That much was perfect for someone with prosthetic limbs and the position of Vice Chancellor.

"But...where are you going?"

"To say goodbye to the others."

"Wait... My dress is torn...and what do you mean say goodbye!?"

Masamune must have heard her voice because she turned around beyond the thinning ether light. A healing charm had been placed over her right eye, but she had also removed the guard to the short sword used in the vow and then

tied it over her right eye.

“Does it look-...?”

The eyepatch girl trailed off, looked at Narumi, and rephrased her sentence.

“Looks good, doesn’t it?”

“Don’t expect me to sympathize with you.”

But Narumi felt a smile in her heart. She was certain Masamune did as well.

Then the hall’s door opened, revealing everyone who had been waiting outside.

“...!”

They gave a joyous roar that was a different form of explosive.

“That settles it then,” said Yoshiaki as she listened to the festival sounds and viewed the snowy land and Novgorod’s original site. “Date, Sviet Rus, and Mogami have all turned the compass of history toward the future. Now we just need the wind to catch our sails.”

As Adele watched her, she munched on a rice cracker and followed Yoshiaki’s gaze. Where was that woman looking? There was a reason she had to ask.

Yoshiaki’s eyes were positioned a little higher than the surface.

Her gaze was horizontal instead of staring down to the bottom of the giant bowl. That was where Novgorod’s land had originally been and her eyebrows moved as she viewed that space.

“Here it comes.”

Eh? thought Adele as she continued following Yoshiaki’s gaze.

...Music.

She heard flutes. She heard the rough but carrying notes of divine protection tones that seemed to define their position. Yoshiyasu quickly looked over.

“Hey, Vassal...Yoshiaki! What is that!?”

Land appeared at the height that Novgorod would have once been.

The land of bluish-white ether light formed in the moonlight and a great many people walked across it.

Adele did not recognize the people.

Those ether light people had a great diversity of race and species, but their equipment was similar yet different from what she was used to. Their equipment was what the IZUMO line called “wedge point style” and they had what looked like hard points, but the confusion came from what most of them carried.

“Those weapons... They’re at the level we call god spears and god swords!!”

“What a knowledgeable vassal. Yes, and it should not be surprising that they are all equipped at that level.”

After all...

“This is the Party of Seven Hundred that entered the phase space 6000km belowground to meet the Environmental Gods during the Age of Dawn. That scene is still carved into this space and is replayed like this.”

The festival dancing around the original site of Novgorod began to move.

The people formed a line and moved in and out from that former land.

“This isn’t just a mining festival, is it?”

Because...

“It’s also a prayer festival asking that they will arrive belowground and return safely.”

“Testament. When our ancestors moved to the Harmonic Territory, the origins of the dance were forgotten, but when we returned here and regrouped with the others, we learned anew what it meant. Ever since, we have offered up the dance like this.”

The seven hundred noble ghosts advanced. Adele knew that only around thirty would return. But those sacrifices allowed them to access the Environmental Gods.

Music from the festival answered the divine protection flutes playing at the

head of the Party.

Drums, string instruments, wind instruments, voices, and dancing combined to overpower the sound absorption of the snowy earth, and fiery lights waved below the moons.

The people who had inherited the present surrounded the past and cheered it on.

Then the seven hundred entered an entrance built into the ground. But...

...Huh?

The story generally envisioned them entering a cave, but they instead passed through a gate leading underground.

“Isn’t that...?” asked Adele. “Isn’t that an academy entrance?”

“You could tell?” replied Yoshiaki. “The world’s first academy was built on this land. It was built underground to help the people survive in this snowy region, but that also allowed a later audience with the Environmental Gods and a way to prevent monsters and mysterious phenomena that emerge from underground... Well, that’s my guess anyway. And once they were able to access the Environmental Gods, they wanted to ensure no one else could do so. So they sealed up the cave...”

Yoshiaki looked up into the sky.

“And they lifted the academy into the sky along with the land it was built into.”

“That settles it.”

The inside of the Ariake was beginning to sink into the dimmer light of night. But the Musashi was lit by the pale lights and stands of a festival. Masazumi spoke from the bridge in front of Okutama’s academy.

“Aoi.”

Me: “Huh? What is it?”

“Judge,” said Masazumi before slowly continuing. She looked to the stands

and people below. “The party is ending. So with ‘Part E’ over, we can get started on Part F.”

Hori-ko: “Did Masazumi-sama just say something?”

Me: “Yeah, I heard it too... Ah, my strength... It’s...fading...”

10ZO: “Toori-dono! Toori-dono! Pull yourself together! Here, I have a Russian porn game!”

Vice President: “Take this seriously!”

Almost Everyone: “You first!!”

What do they mean by that? Well, who cares. Oh, Tsukinowa is so cute. Um, what was I trying to say again?

“Aoi. Give the order to send out the Musashi. Our destination will be Novgorod in Sviet Rus. And our objective...”

Masazumi raised her eyebrows somewhat.

“To support Sviet Rus’s history recreation as mercenaries and to prevent P.A. Oda from making arbitrary use of the history recreation. This will also be a test flight, so it will all be ‘experimental’.”

Me: “Oh? You’re ready to do this, Seijun!? So it’s war after all!”

“Judge. Yes, that’s right.”

She did not feel like denying it.

“It’s war this time. That too is a way of resolving political disputes.”

She was not afraid to let the corners of her lips form a smile.

“Give us the order, Aoi. You are Musashi’s Chancellor and Student Council President. You take the lead and we’ll follow you and get moving. And to do that...”

Me: “Sure. Then come on over. And bring the Musashi with you.”

“...Judge!!”

Masazumi nodded and swept her right hand outward. A communications sign frame opened and “Musashi” nodded inside it.

“I will send a simultaneous divine transmission to all ships. We will assist you. Over.”

Sakai was waving toward Masazumi from behind “Musashi”. Masazumi nodded when she saw his kiseru moving as if telling her to take care of all this.

To ensure her voice reached everyone, she spoke into the sign frame that was recording her and all of the people on the Musashi down below.

“Attention all Musashi passengers and crew!”

She breathed in and made sure everyone was turning her way.

She raised her right hand, swung it down to the side, and clenched her fist.

“Musashi will now leave on a test flight to Novgorod!!”

Chapter 78: Prover on the Hunting Ground

第七十八章

『狩り場の証明者』

始まりの初撃 -
終わりの終撃
間にあるものは何か
配点 (確認)



What lies between

The opening attack

And the ending attack?

Point Allocation (Confirmation)

They had the signal to leave port.

In the power section of the engine division, Naomasa and the other female team members were confirming their posts. Her eyebrows relaxed when she heard what Masazumi had said.

“You really can change overnight, can’t you?”

“Judge,” agreed the others. “A girl only needs five seconds to change.”

They all laughed as some voices arrived via divine transmission. It began with “Musashi’s” voice.

“Good evening, everyone. This is ‘Musashi’. Currently, the ship’s flight ability is at 92%, armament operability is at 87%, and residences are at 77%. ...We are capable of leaving port. The residents who cannot board in time will be left at the Mito land ports and we will allow them to board once we return. Thus...”

“Musashi” voice paused for a beat.

“The time limit is 2 minutes and 12 seconds. Please board before then. Over.”

The shouting outside the ship was audible through the armor. And the engine division was shaken by a supposedly impossible earthquake.

The people waiting on the Ariake were boarding the Musashi. The overlapping footsteps and pounding feet shook the engine division at the bottom of the ship, so it sounded like rain on the ceiling.

“Listen up, all of you!”

Taizou’s voice reached them from the bridge across the center of the engine division.

“The Ariake is going to open up on the bottom. We’ll be thrown out, so make

sure we aren't caught in the countercurrent! We're showing off the new and improved Musashi for the first time here, so work to control her nice and smoothly!"

Ookubo did not really understand where she was.

She was in the engine division. More than that, she was in the important section that controlled the foundation of their power. For some reason, she was equipped like one of the workers and she wore a hairpin that provided a head protection spell.

"Oh, young lady. You look a lot more mature with your hair done up like that."

"Th-thanks."

She checked her reflection in the white paneling of an engine and saw the members of the 6th Girls Team standing behind her and doing up her hair. Kanou was already prepared and she was asking the second-in-command about their work.

"We have our orders from the division head, but...I have determined that look suits you well, milady."

"Oh, um... Where's Yagyuu-kun?"

"Munenori-sama is working with an engine division boys team. The Operations Committee is in charge of assigning people to teams and they were saying something about throwing him on the Shudo Team because he is cute, but, well, he has the skill to protect himself, so he should be fine."

"Yeah, there are a lot of former students on that team, so they're pretty skilled."

That last comment worried Ookubo, so she hoped he would be fine. The Yagyuu family had left him with her as a bodyguard, so it would be best if he did not pick up any strange skills due to her. But...

"Why are you here, young ladies?" someone asked. "Were you demoted?"

"No...due to the earlier attack, we asked where we could find the safest place

where we could also be of some use...”

“You’re being too self-conscious! Way too self-conscious!! Young girls like you need to have plenty of confidence!”

The older female worker laughed. Ookubo was used to ignoring that sort of reaction, but...

“...You’re probably right.”

She did not ignore it. She was not sure why, but...

...I accepted it.

As a politician and as a normal citizen, she had to hide her negative aspects.

But at the moment, she did not know what she needed to do as a politician. After all...

...The special student general assembly only just ended...

If she ignored this, it would only look like she was acting tough. All of her past political performances had been the direct result of her own weaknesses. Once she started feeling that way...

...It’s hopeless.

She wondered what to do about herself.

But the worker who had laughed accepted those emotions. She turned back, and...

“You’re a smart girl, aren’t you?”

“Eh?”

“When you’re strong, you don’t let your weaknesses show. And when you’re weak, you don’t let your strengths show. ...You’re almost unfairly smart.”

There was no sarcasm in her voice. She placed her hands on her hips and smiled bitterly.

“You’re someone who can’t be wasted down here. Do what you’ve got to do to get back up top soon.”

The other workers laughed and agreed.

“The people who come down here and then crawl back up tend to hit the jackpot. Like winning an English princess.”

Ookubo was unsure what that meant, but Kanou spoke up while checking a sign frame.

“Milady, it is time to work. ...We must inspect various areas. I received an image of what we must inspect, so let’s go ensure the readings and shapes are correct.” Kanou raised her eyes in a smile. “Yes, let’s make this a race.”

Countless sign frames opened on the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Neshinbara received a portion of them and listened to a divine transmission from “Asakusa”.

“Neshinbara-sama, we have detected movement in the sky above the Edo region to the south. According to our observations, the Jurakudai has left port. It seems to have begun traveling to the Novgorod region using pseudo-gravitational cruising. Over.”

“Judge. That means the materiel and personnel Hashiba carried to Edo includes some they wish to hurry to Novgorod. Niwa, Komahime, and Hidetsugu might go with them.”

“Judge. They seem to have fixed their armaments in place and will function as a defensive ship in a battle. The Jurakudai is a combat diplomatic ship and the flagship of Hidetsugu’s fleet, so it will have powerful defensive spells. Its equipment suggests the same. If it has the same level of power as the Shirasagi Castle...”

Neshinbara viewed the example diagram sent by “Asakusa”.

“Then I have determined their defensive range will reach 7km assuming they focus on defense. Simply put, the one ship can defend two attack fleets spread out over a wide area. Over.”

That’s a ridiculously powerful defensive ship, thought Neshinbara with a frown.

...*Most likely*...

“This one ship can defend an Azuchi Castle class ship. Or...it’s meant to defend an expert’s one-ship charge like we saw during the Battle of Mikatagahara.”

“Shockingly, your opinion matches ours, Neshinbara-sama. Does that mean we are wrong? Debating...conclusion reached. Neshinbara-sama, you were lucky this time. Over.”

“D-dammit, I’m not gonna lose...!”

An iron smell wafted through the air. Which meant...

“The Ariake is preparing to open up. Honda-kun, you should have your anteater activate a footing spell. This isn’t going to be fun when the floor opens up below us.”

“R-right. Judge.”

Masazumi turned his way and nodded.

Seeing that, Neshinbara used the divine chat while thinking, *I’m not good at putting on this kind of act*. He saw a spell appear at Masazumi’s feet to solidify her footing and fix her in place.

Novice: “We’re counting on you, Technohexen. We only have one shot at this.”

“This is clearly a trap. Even I can tell, Anayama.”

A boy’s voice sounded along a dark path illuminated by a series of dim lights.

Anayama, one of the Sanada Ten Braves, could be heard responding.

“But this is the best timing for us, Nezu-kun. ...Making an appearance here would make for a nice advertisement.”

“I understand what you’re saying and that this is a very difficult job. So the festival is over and so are we. ...I really liked the roast squid here.”

“Oh? We have similar tastes, Nezu-kun.”

“I take back what I said.”

“Which part?”

“Testament.” Nezu started to move. “That the festival is over. Our festival is only just beginning. As part of the reason we had our first ending, I will fire the signal gun.”

Naruze lay on Ariadust Academy’s rooftop.

Burning Surroundings was opened just a bit above her head and it sent data to the Magie Figure by her hands. She used Burning Surroundings to take video of the locations indicated as dangerous sniping points and she displayed them all by her hands. But...

...I can predict when the sniper attack will happen, but I can’t predict how they’ll do it.

Naruze had been the one to inform the others that the Sanada Ten Braves would attack again.

She had done so after the meeting with Yasuhira in the cafeteria.

They had all had their suspicions that another attack was coming, so she had stepped forward to lecture them.

“Given the attack on Futayo, it’s noticeable that there was no sniper fire during the attack by the automatons. That might just mean that the sniper had already fled, but my M.H.R.R. blood makes me assume the worst.”

So...

“I doubt they’ll stay silent now that we made a fool of their dolls’ attack. Most likely, they’ll attack again when the Musashi leaves the Ariake. And...they’ll target our VIPs who have plenty of openings.”

Naruze had then looked to Margot who had silently applauded with a smile.

She had likely been telling Naruze how cool she was and to take it easy, so Naruze had continued while aware that everyone already knew this and that it was public knowledge.

“I come from an anti-Techno Magie unit in M.H.R.R. Countermeasures for

Schwarz Techno sniper fire and cannon fire were passed down from father to child.”

“Yeah.” Margot had spoken up without warning. “My family was also part of a unit like that. They had a different specialty, but I can confirm what Ga-chan is saying.”

“Then do you consider another attack – and a sniper attack in particular – to be possible, Naito-sama?”

“It would be perfect if Seijun could act as bait.”

Margot sometimes had a way of being really blunt, but that was what made her so wonderful. However...

“Me!?” Masazumi had stood up and placed a hand on her chest. “W-wait! Would I really be safe acting as bait for an attack? I would have a defense spell, right?”

“Put up one of those and they’d notice. Calm down, Seijun.”

“Th-then I’ll have a bodyguard, right!?”

“If someone would get in their way, they would give up on you. You have to show more motivation, Seijun.”

“Then what am I supposed to do!?”

“If you forgot everything you heard here and acted like normal, I don’t think you would be afraid at all.”

Margot is really amazing sometimes, Naruze had thought, but Masazumi’s response had been equally amazing.

“Don’t ask for the impossible!”

“Now, now.” Naruze had waved toward Masazumi. “Calm down, Masazumi. Bait doesn’t get any rights.”

“I think you mean no one has the right to use people as bait!”

“Just leave this up to an expert and you’ll be fine. Do we know anything about who we’re up against?”

“Judge.” Gin nodded. “There might be multiple snipers. They cannot be

captured. It is unknown what kinds of bullets are being used. There were bullet holes at the site of the attack, but no actual bullets were found.”

“Well, this is hopeless...”

“You just said it would be fine! Like ten seconds ago!”

At least their bait was lively. But Naruze had had a number of thoughts on the issue, so...

“If we put the bait out there as bait and if what Gin says is accurate, then we can pull this off somehow or other.”

“Wait, are you sure about this, Naruze...?”

“Judge. It’s just like flying. ...Victory goes to the side that’s better in the moment.”

Masazumi had looked incredibly displeased, but that was just how it was going to be.

Practice and planning meetings could not compare to the atmosphere of the real deal. People were often told to do things just like they had practiced, but once you reached a certain level...

“You can do even better than in practice.”

On the roof, Naruze focused on the present once more. She looked at her Magie Figur and thought.

...Now, I just hope our bait actually works.

Nezu walked through the festival crowd.

He felt he had adequately prepared, but...

...I need to aim even closer to perfection.

I cannot afford to fail, he thought. I need to corner myself.

He had to corner himself and continue cornering himself, but it would never be enough. After all...

“It’s my fault that we became Unneeded.”

They had once taken part in a series of duels that could be seen as a game. A mistake of his has led to their defeat and then they had left their rightful position. There had been other options for them there, but their pride had not allowed it and they had sought a new place for themselves.

“That was when Sanada let us in...”

The Ten Braves of Sanada Academy had grown old as the Warring States period had continued on and on without ending. The old Ten Braves had rejoiced at their arrival, become their “teachers”, and allowed them to inherit the position.

...So...

He could hear festival music. A large sign frame overhead displayed the countdown until the ship left port.

It dropped below a minute to go.

On the main street, he heard a song he had heard a few times before. He recalled it was the song of the silver wolf in a trio led by the shrine maiden of the Asama Shrine. A dancer sang the song in a carrying soprano.

“My heart is at home in the world’s grasp. It trembles in the reverberation of the present.

“There is not much future in the lacking present. The light of the past only casts a shadow.”

Nezu could understand that. Had she lost something?

No, he knew he should not be taking a festival song so seriously. But...

“I hear something in the anger spreading before my eyes. Everything seems unnecessary, but it simply dries up.

“I sense heat in the worries lying at my feet. Everything seems in my way, but I simply step over it.

“La la la...

“That’s fine. I only have to continue struggling with my impatient and wavering heart.

“That’s fine. No one can stop this impatient and trembling heart.”

The countdown reached 5. As he listened to the song on the road, he was just one person at the festival.

The worries in his heart could not be seen from outside.

Just like a true ninja.

He could not be stopped.

Naruze read the moment.

...If my prediction was right...!

It would happen as soon as the countdown reached 0.

It would happen as the bottom of the Ariake opened up and the Musashi was ejected.

“Zero.”

Naruze spoke the countdown aloud.

A moment later, she heard a sniper shot hit.

“Impossible...!”

Just as the Musashi began to shake, Nezu uttered a voiceless voice on the main road.

His timing and aim had been perfect. And...

“The Musashi Vice President...!”

He looked up with just his eyes and saw someone on Musashi Ariadust Academy’s bridge.

Musashi’s Vice President almost tripped and then sat down.

When she had ridden a god of war in her rush to reach the scene of the earlier attack, he had learned that she was not used to balancing herself on the Musashi. That was why he had decided not to target her.

He had targeted someone with more solid footing.

...Someone who had been in a position to know it was us after we fled.

And someone waiting in a position where they would be oblivious to his approach.

“Musashi’s 4th Special Duty Officer...!”

He had seen a glimpse of color on the rooftop. It had been white. But it had not been the color of the 4th Special Duty Officer’s Technohexen outfit. What he saw scattering and swaying was...

“Yuri...!”

Naruze realized her prediction had been right.

She was surrounded by Burning Surroundings which she had converted into a defense spell, so...

...I blocked the bullets!

There had been eight bullets in all. And...

“Our own components? I’m impressed!”

The enemy had not used actual bullets. Instead, they had used screws, nails, stones, and glass shards, all of which could be found anywhere on the Musashi at the moment.

After the previous attack, she had had “Musashino” and the other automatons analyze the images from Burning Surroundings, but there had been no sign of the enemy. That was when she had figured it out. The enemy was remote controlling the bullets for their “sniper” shots. When Futayo had been sniped at the Blue Thunder, they had not found any bullets because the enemy had likely used glass shards.

And this time, the enemy had targeted Naruze.

After all, the flying bullets had come from different parts of the rooftop. And from those positions, there was a way for a sniper to ensure a hit with remote-controlled bullets: a stationary target.

That meant targeting her.

That was why she had used Masazumi as bait.

She knew that the enemy had targeted Masazumi and the others in order to set up their attack on her. From that, they had learned that she would not get up and pursue them, so...

...They decided I wouldn't move for no reason.

So she had used Masazumi as bait to make it look like she had not caught on. She ensured the enemy would target her by acting like she assumed they were after Masazumi.

And the enemy had responded just as she had hoped. And not just with a sniper attack.

"How about that?"

Naruze looked back toward someone behind her.

It was a hooded girl armed with two swords. She had a sharp look in her eyes.

"...Kh."

Her right side was stained with a dark red. Margot's sniper spell had been too much for the bulletproofing of a Qing-Takeda girl's uniform to fully block.

The powerful attack had smashed the enemy's body.

This was a real human and not an automaton. She trembled from the shock and started to take a step back.

"..."

But she resisted and raised the sword in her right hand.

She came in for the attack.

Yuri Kamanosuke, one of the Ten Braves, bet everything on that one sword.

She made an unavoidable attack.

She started by rushing up to the enemy and making a jab. The enemy would of course dodge the jabbing sword, so after the enemy's body had slipped to

the side of the blade, she rotated her wrist.

While using her palm to give the hilt a dancing rotation, she aimed the blade toward the enemy's back.

Then she pulled back and cut them.

"Kh..."

The white Technohexen spun her body to evade.

Well done, thought Yuri. The Technohexen was the long-range and spell type, but she still dodged the close-range attack. But Yuri's ninja technique had only just begun.

"...!"

When she pulled the blade back, the speed and motion were unified along a straight line, so they created a vacuum.

It was a vacuum blade.

If an enemy dodged her previous attack, their movement would create an air current. That would suck in the vacuum she had created, effectively releasing it.

...And it cuts them!

That was the unavoidable attack. With the enemies she had faced before, it had hit them from behind after they were already defeated, but...

"...!?"

The vacuum vanished.

Yuri thought about what that meant and then she heard a voice.

"It's too bad. ...The Peerless in the West saw through that trick. And that just leaves..."

The black wings on her enemy's back were closed up. By detonating the air built up inside them, she crushed the vacuum Yuri had created.

"...!"

The explosion of air sent the white Technohexen flying through the air. And it hit Yuri with an impact as well.

Her sword shattered and the hilt was knocked from her grasp. Her right thumb caught on the hilt and she saw it bend at an odd angle. But...

...Ah!

Her left sword also broke at the middle.

The sniper shots continued.

Naito lay face down on top of Musashi's bridge as she fired sniper shots.

Schwarz Fräulein was in sniper form and attached to her right shoulder's hard point. Several Magie Figurs that combined acceleration spells with targeting spells were opened across Schwarz Fräulein's long ship's bow and she fired coin bullets from there.

As the bullets were repeatedly accelerated by the aligned Magie Figurs...

"Herrlich!"

She fired them through the spell sight.

The sword shattered and flew away. Even the hilt was destroyed in midair.

The enemy's body fared little better. A bullet pierced her shoulder and one grazed her knee. A lower-speed non-penetrative bullet struck her shin.

"Kneel."

She fell down on one knee.

"Not like that."

She fell down on both knees. And...

"Look up."

A bullet to the shoulder knocked her upper body back. Then Naito raised her eyebrows and spoke.

"If you care about your comrades, what should you do at times like this?"

Nezu stopped moving.

...How!?

If they had screwed something up, that was fine. If they had planned poorly, that was even better. If there was something they had done wrong, they could fix it and win next time.

But this was different. The enemy had predicted their strategy and their thoughts and then outdone them.

“Kh...”

No matter what they fixed or did better, they could not win here.

Their enemy was simply “better” than them. But if he accepted that...

...I would be saying we can't escape our position as the Unneeded!

“———”

Nezu tried to think up a way to rescue Yuri right this instant.

There was a way.

He could indiscriminately fire the “bullets” he had set up all over the Musashi. They would tear through the people out enjoying the festive atmosphere and the crew running around to prepare for leaving port.

The commotion that caused would likely create enough of an opening for him to rescue Yuri.

So he raised his right hand in order to activate all of those “bullets”. But...

“You can't do that, Nezu-kun.”

Someone gave his raised right hand a high-five as they walked by.

“We each need to make up for our own mistakes. That is our rule. ...Leave Yuri-kun to fend for herself.”

It was Anayama. He passed by and gestured for him to follow.

“Isa-kun is already at the escape point. We need to get going too.”

“But...!”

“We have not failed,” bluntly said Anayama. “We gained some internal information. And the Musashi will be damaged in an explosion when it leaves

port. Let's go watch that from outside."

Nezu understood what Anayama was saying. Isa's sabotage would take effect when the Musashi left port. That explosion would give Yuri a chance to escape.

Yuri could escape, so there was no need to rescue her here.

So Nezu lowered his right hand.

"...Sorry."

"You should be apologizing for what a silly thing you were about to do, Nezu-kun. Going in to rescue Yuri-kun is what an awkward boy in love would do. Yes, I remember my teenage days."

"Wha-...!?"

"That's enough." Anayama approached and patted him on the back. "And Yuri-kun isn't about to get herself killed. So..."

Just as Anayama said that, a vibration ran through the Musashi's deck.

It had been shaking vertically before, but this one was horizontal.

"It's begun. ...I've seen it a few times from outside, but this is my first time while on the Musashi."

Nezu listened to Anayama while hurrying toward the bow and worriedly looking back in Yuri's direction.

"The Ariake is opening up from below. Once the Musashi is ejected, it will be newly revealed for the first time."

Someone in the night sky viewed a different night sky.

A combat diplomatic ship traveled northwest. The name Jurakudai was printed on the side and someone glowed palely on the deck.

It was a girl with fox ears, Komahime. She looked back as Niwa stepped out from the observation deck behind her.

"Niwa-sama, the Ariake...!"

"Yes, it seems to be ejecting the Musashi. It's started to turn. ...What do you

think as the Acting Captain taking Lord Hidetsugu's place?"

"Testament. When something that massive moves, it must move the air quite a bit. I expect it has a buffering spell on the bottom, but when it moves horizontally..."

It came.

As Komahime watched, an explosion of white fog appeared at the various ends of the turning Ariake. The fog waved and extended all the way to the Jurakudai.

"Here it comes! We will be sucked toward it after the impact, so have each ship continue with inertial cruising while turned away from the Ariake! Using powered cruising will only get us stalled as it sucks us in! Also..."

The shaking passed by the Jurakudai.

Each of the ship's armor panels seemed to vibrate as the impact swept across it. And then...

"Here comes the receding wave!"

The Jurakudai was a large ship, but it slid backwards through the air. It was carried toward the Ariake as if by a giant hand.

The other ships in the fleet also slid, but then they tilted.

"Activate buffering spells! ...Open defense barriers inside those!"

As Komahime gave her orders, ship defense barriers opened on the Jurakudai. Hundreds of them appeared all at once, and...

"Support the rest of the ships!!"

There were eight other ships, some ahead of and some behind the Jurakudai. All of those were supported by groups of defense barriers.

They extended five kilometers around the Jurakudai and they supported the other ships as if holding them between the two sides of an opened book. The entire fleet's approach toward the Ariake came to a stop.

"...!"

And the people on the ships' decks waved and shouted toward her through

the night.

Flashing lights of thanks arrived from the bridges, so Komahime smiled in relief.

But the Ariake's turn was not even a third of the way complete. More and more shockwaves arrived and the creaking of the air reverberated through the heavens.

Komahime stared at the Ariake below that shaking and noise.

"Niwa-sama, um, how is Hidetsugu-sama?"

"Shaja. ...The Seiryu has vanished and he is sleeping peacefully. I thought he might vanish when the Seiryu was released, but that didn't happen. I wonder what his regret was..."

"I think he was sad about Date's future."

After all...

"That worry will never vanish and he will continue to exist."

"That would be convenient for you."

"Eh?"

Niwa smiled at Komahime's confusion.

"There is nothing one wants to continue longer than a love they can never have."

"Niwa-sama, you always make it sound like you understand, but-..."

Komahime trailed off as she glared at Niwa.

She heard a sound through the wind. The Ariake was moving again, which would send a new wave to sweep across the Jurakudai's deck.

"The bottom...is opening!"

On the bridge of Musahino, Musashi's first central ship, "Musashino" and the other automaton commanders were exchanging commands with the ship crews and the Ariake controllers.

But “Musashino” was not giving many instructions at the center of it all. She was watching the ether flower gardens that informed her of the progress in various parts of the ships. Eight flower gardens surrounded her. They had sign frames, the stems of ether flowers grew from them, and the flower petals slowly spread.

“First port and starboard ships, move out ahead and release power restrictions. Ariake, please handle the ether pools in the first port and starboard docks. Over.”

As she watched them grow, she quietly spoke into a sign frame.

“ ‘Musashi’-sama, please temporarily alter the Musashi’s name in our shared memory. There is a possibility of a discrepancy occurring with the previous ships, which would create noise during comparisons. Over.”

“Judge. Since this is a new version, how about Young Musashi or Zero Musashi?”

“Why are you so obsessed with your age, ‘Musashi’-san? Do you have some weird sort of pride about that?”

“Musashi” glared at Sakai on the sign frame, but “Musashino” continued like normal.

“The Ariake’s turn is 40% complete. ...We will be ejected in 3 minutes and 12 seconds. Over.”

Chapter 79: Restorer in a Damaged Place

第七十九章

『破損場所の挽回者』



意地の張り所を
間違えなければ
成果は出るのだからか
配点（強がり）

If you choose the right place

To make a stand

Will you show results?

Point Allocation (Bravado)

The work continued at the bottom of the shaking and at the central axis of the turn.

The final adjustments were being made in the control sector for the gravitational acceleration engines on the bottom of Musashino. All of the accelerators were being checked over, but...

“Hey, new girl, you’re falling behind!”

The Engine Division Chief called down from the bridge overhead, so Ookubo yelled back.

“Judge! I’ll speed it up!”

“Sure.” The chief spoke calmly from the shaking bridge. “But make sure you do it right. Speed up doing things right, young lady. Don’t just try to get it done as fast as you can.”

“Judge. I’ll remember that!”

The accelerators were giant devices, but they were mostly a torii-style acceleration thruster. The control section was a panel containing a combination of wiring and charms, so a single person could check over it. Kanou was already five ahead of her, so their race was pretty much already decided. But...

...I don’t like giving up on a challenge.

So she made each of her actions more compact. She could reduce the time a surprising amount just by altering her movements, so she may simply have been inexperienced. But once she had checked around twenty of them...

“...Yes.”

I can do this job, she decided.

She might have to give up if she was given a more difficult job and she might not be able to keep her motivation up, but she ignored those future unknowns for another conclusion:

...A life like this would work too, wouldn't it?

A fall from grace might not be all that bad, she decided.

"...?"

Then Ookubo stopped her work. She had not made a mistake. The components were all tightened in place, but something seemed off to her about the accelerator before her eyes.

...What is it?

She tilted her head at a strange feeling she could not quite put her finger on.

"Hey, new girl! You've stopped!"

"Judge," replied Ookubo as she started to add a circle to the check sheet.

That was when the floor rotated below her. The Ariake had begun to turn. The movement caused her to fall toward the accelerator without being able to mark its check complete.

Oh, no, she thought while reaching out her false arm to grab the control device. The shaking continued as she confirmed that the components in the control device had not shifted out of place.

...Good.

There wasn't a problem after all. I must have been mistaken about something being wrong, she thought.

"..."

Then she realized where that feeling had come from. She noticed what it was that should not be there.

"Engine Division Chief!"

If she was mistaken, this would be a big problem for her, but...

"There might be something wrong! ...Please come check this out!!"

“What is it!? Can you explain it to me, young lady!?”

“Judge.”

She knew everyone was watching her, but she still swung her false arm to deliver a powerful backhand blow to the acceleration control device while she was shaken by the turning of the Ariake.

With a solid sound, the control device shook, but...

“The components aren’t budging! The ones worked on by our people are fixed in place so they can be easily removed for future maintenance. However, this one isn’t just holding the internal components in. The whole thing is made so it can’t be removed!”

The components were made so they could be removed. That was why they had to check them during shaking like this. But if this one had been made so it could not be removed...

...There must have been a reason!

The chief jumped down from the bridge. He landed surprisingly lightly and brushed off the soles of his shoes with his hand.

“Young lady... Might that one have been done by an outsider who wasn’t used to how we do things?”

“According to the check sheet, this one was done by a girl named Isami. ...The family register says she’s a Musashi resident.” Ookubo got down on one knee. “Please. I don’t care if this shames me. I’ve already been shamed plenty. I don’t understand this, so please send over someone who can inspect this properly and has the time to spare.”

“Um, young lady...?” The chief sounded exasperated. “I think I’m the only one that fits those requirements.”

The others raised their voices in agreement and the 6th Special Duty Officer spoke from the shoulder of a distant god of war.

“Kahhh! Act your age, old man!”

“Shut up, Naomasa! Okay, young lady, give me seven seconds. There’s a trick to this. ...And get me a list of all the ones this Isami girl did! Anyone else with

the time to spare go inspect those!”

Listen.

“This young politician just found out we do a half-assed job! We need to fix this to keep her quiet!!”

The Ariake was full of noise as it turned.

That giant floating dock was an artificial structure. It could move and turn, but...

“Wait, wait! Is this really okay!?”

As Masazumi leaned against the railing on the academy bridge, she looked across the dim interior of the Ariake.

...This is a lot like a festival now!

Spell circles for buffer spells opened like hanging barriers inside the turning Ariake. Most of them were on the joints between the walls and the ceiling or floor, but spell circles were also appearing and disappearing at the center of the floor and on the composite truss frames that supported the walls. Buffering adjustments were being made at high speed.

They were turning to the right, which meant clockwise. Buffer spells ran between the Musashi and the dock to ensure the Musashi was not damaged by its own weight pressing against the inner walls of the dock.

They turned.

Their destination was Novgorod to the west. They were turning in that direction and then the Musashi would be ejected from the Ariake.

At times, she heard sounds of metallic collisions from the walls.

As the Ariake bent, the elevators climbing the walls were losing their hold on the rails and sliding down.

She also heard materials collapsing in the materials yards and stacks of wooden containers collapsing.

Even so, they turned.

For a ship the size of the Musashi, the time just after leaving port was the most dangerous. It could not pick up speed right away and it could not turn like it might want. That was why they had the Ariake turn and then launch them.

“I suppose that lets us start off at our top speed while facing our destination.”

Light was filling the dock tanks that the Musashi was held inside.

It was Orei Nero made by melting spells and ether. When it touched the Musashi, it gave powerful buoyancy to the contact surface.

...So we float.

In an instant, Masazumi felt a shaking below her feet. But...

“Ah...”

This was the instability of the Musashi floating. She felt her body lifted up from below.

...It's such a relief because it feels so familiar.

She could not stop the smile that appeared on her lips.

The Musashi floated on the Orei Nero in each dock and a loud creaking could be heard as the giant volume was pushed up. The sound only grew as the turn continued.

After all, this turn was powerful enough to nearly throw Masazumi to the ground as she sat there.

But the Musashi itself did not creak much. Most likely, that was thanks to what was happening in the plaza down below.

“The tuning from Asama, the Aoi Sister, and Mitotsudaira's Gagaku.”

It had not just been those three. On festival stages in the main plazas of each ship, tuning music had been played to make offerings in advance. Right now, some Rock Gagaku was playing.

“In the old days, I was made to dance. I always thought I had plenty before my eyes. A mistaken late bloomer.

“When I danced and looked ahead, I realized there was nothing in the distance before my eyes. A cowardly late bloomer.”

She heard some newly sung lyrics.

“I do not have enough that is new, but I insist that an embrace is made with a crawling motion.

“Everything from the past is so kind, but I insist that I have cast off my restraints and grown lighter.”

'Didn't Asama sing this one last night?' thought Masazumi.

Then she heard another sound from the Musashi's side blocks. The giant joints were opening and the Musashi was transforming within the Orei Nero. The gravitational accelerators were parting the bluish-white glowing water as they opened.

At the same time, she heard something from the Ariake's ceiling. The edges of the vast ceiling were opening.

That was meant to allow air in and prevent a pressure difference when the Musashi was allowed out on the bottom. She felt somewhat damp but thick air descend from the sky.

“...?”

She sensed an odd presence overhead.

As soon as she looked up, she saw two colors: white and black. The white was clothing and equipment while the black was hair and wings.

“Naruze!?”

As the inertia of the turn reached her, Masazumi saw Naruze jump from the roof and into the air.

Then she saw something like a straight-line tremor leap from the direction of the ship's bow. It moved toward the roof and exploded.

Naito prepared to fire again while watching the result of the shot she had fired toward Okutama's stern.

The smoke rising from Musashi Ariadust Academy's roof moved to the side thanks to the Ariake's turning and was pushed down by the ventilation from

above. She also saw something stepping out toward her from the explosive smoke.

...That isn't a god of war, is it?

As soon as she thought that, light exploded. As Naruze fled through the air, multiple short-range guided shots were fired at her from within the smoke.

“Ga-chan! Left!”

Just as Naruze dodged to the left, two attacks intersected.

The coin roll bullet Naito had fired collided with the light being fired from the top of the smoke.

With a scorching sound, an explosion of light scattered through the air between Okutama and Musashino.

The enemy's optical cannon and Naito's bullet had cancelled each other out. That meant her sniping position was no longer safe, but it also blew away the smoke lingering on the roof.

...I can see it now!

Something like a god of war stood on the roof with a kneeling Sanada swordswoman in its hand.

It was a god of war's upper body, tall head, and thick arms. She had seen this at IZUMO too. It had four arms now, but she knew who the girl standing in front of the god-of-war-like thing was.

“Isa of the Sanada Ten Braves!”

Isa felt the power of Mikoshi Nyuudou, her giant false arm, from the feedback to her right gauntlet.

The giant hand held Yuri, who was bloody but looking Isa's way.

“Isa...!”

“Yeah, try not to talk. I'm using several arms this time since this is a lot closer to being a home game than in IZUMO. And...”

Isa gave Yuri a smile with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“We’ve got to see how my sabotage turns out, don’t we?”

“Don’t tell me not to talk only to turn around and ask me a question.”

Isa laughed but then raised her eyebrows.

She crossed her arms in an X-shape and Mikoshi Nyuudou did the same. And...

“Time to escape. C’mon. Our destination is the corridor on the Ariake’s bow. ...The floor duct will open for pressure regulation when the Musashi is sent out, so we’ll get out through there.”

That was a long ways away, but it was a good way to show off their skill.

So Isa gave a shout while spreading her arms.

“Sanada Academy! Sanada Ten Braves #4...Isa!! It’s time to test Musashi’s strength!!”

With those words, Isa started forward.

She had a god of war arm throw her from the roof in an instantaneous leap of more than 100 meters.

“Anayama!”

Anayama nodded toward Nezu as they hurried along.

“I know what you want to say, so try to stay quiet.”

“How can I? Why did you lie!?”

“Testament. Because it would have accomplished nothing for you to remain there. Oh, and the same goes for me.”

Anayama mentioned himself to prevent Nezu from thinking that meant he was lacking. And...

“Isa-kun was the best option to increase Yuri-kun’s odds of survival. In fact, Isa-kun was the only real option based on who we have to work with here. And it’s important that she sees for herself if her sabotage works. So...”

They heard a loud noise behind them.

It was the sound of Isa landing in the nature district toward the back of Okutama. Due to the Musashi's turning, she had landed a bit to the right of center.

"They've made it out of the street they call Remorse Way!"

In the long block that connected Remorse Way to the bow, a firing unit primarily made up of Schwarz Hexen waited for Isa to charge out.

"Readyyyyyy!"

When the second year Schwarz Hexen who commanded the unit raised her voice, the firing used to intercept Isa on Remorse Way came to a stop. The Technohexen who had been firing on the road from the forest near the end of Remorse Way flew into the air.

Next, someone raced out from Remorse Way's exit.

"Fiiiiire!!"

A double digit number of shots were fired. The firing became rapid-fire and tore into the figure that had run out. But they all noticed something.

It had to do with the three Schwarz Hexen who had flown from the trees on the port side of Remorse Way.

"Trees...!?"

They were actually tree trunks made to look like flying Technohexen. All three fell from the sky and collided with the firing unit.

The Technohexen had been too focused on firing to dodge. They were also surprised to find their supposed allies were actually thrown weapons, but...

"Commander!"

Everyone saw the identity of the figure they had been firing on. It was no more than a tree and branches with Isa's coat wrapped around it.

"A substitution technique..."

It was likely one of the trees Isa had felled with her giant metal arms. It had looked like the girl for the same reason the flying trees had looked like their

fellow Technohexen.

“She matched the movements and timing to the real thing...”

“That’s right!”

A voice reached them from behind. It came from the portside woods instead of Remorse Way. Someone rushed out into the long block with a single metal arm holding the attacker girl.

It was Isa.

She was behind the Technohexen who had spread out on the port side of the road. Isa swung her arm, spun around, ran, and leaped toward the next wide block. She did not use the roads. The ninja girl shouted back at them as she leaped into the forest.

“Sorry about that!”

What she meant soon became clear.

Felled trees appeared above the Technohexen she had looked back at.

No, they had not just appeared out of thin air. Just as Isa had charged out, she had silently thrown them at a gentle speed.

There were five of them and they all collided with the Technohexen positioned on either side of the road.

Isa felt a gust of wind as she leaped onto the next wide block.

It was a heavy wind. The thick wind seemed to be catching up with the turning motion.

“The Ariake is ending its turn...!”

It was a wind of stopping. That pressurized wind could only mean one thing.

“The Ariake is about to release the Musashi...!”

Then she saw light to her left and right. The Orei Nero filling the storage tanks that held the Musashi was reacting to the movement of the bottom door by spraying upwards.

The ether light illuminated the Musashi's silhouette within the Ariake.

In the engine division, a decision was made concerning the alteration made to the accelerator control device.

Taizou had deactivated the device and was preparing to remove it, but...

"They did a good job at this. ...It's made to detonate if you carelessly remove it."

"Wow..." said Hiro as she ran over and lowered her shoulders next to Taizou. "I was the one that accepted Isami in. Sorry, I was just so excited getting to work as a group leader..."

"Getting excited is fine, so get working, Hiro. The Musashi will be ejected soon. ...We need to use the accelerators right away. If we don't do something in the next minute or so, Musashino's port accelerators will explode."

"Can't we stop the Musashi's ejection?"

"I told you to get working, didn't I?"

"I see." Hiro nodded and then breathed in. "Grampa, which way would we be moving?"

"Forward, generally."

"I see," said Hiro again before looking to a certain person. "Representative Council Head."

"Me? Do you need something?"

"Judge. I want you to do a job that can't be done in the engine division. It's a positive thing, so can you take care of that?"

Isa arrived on Musashino.

She was on top of the large tower that covered the back of the surface city.

Okutama and Musashino were normally positioned far apart, but in the dock, they were almost close enough to touch.

A single leap had taken Isa to Musashino's tower.

"Here goes!"

"Isa...!"

Isa did not need to ask what had made Yuri shout her name.

She was both injured and worn down.

She had run a long distance while exposed to countless bullets and explosions. It would have been odd if she was unharmed and well rested. But...

...Once I make it across here, we've escaped.

She had made it halfway, so it was only natural to assume she could make the second half.

The tower rooftop was large, so she started running as soon as she landed. Her destination was the elementary school building at the very back of the Musashino surface city beyond the tower.

She viewed Musashino's city while running along the tower wall.

...Ohh.

The scenery spread out before her. The tower roof was far higher than Musashino's surface.

Looking down on a city was an impossible angle back in Sanada. Then Isa had a metal arm push on her back to perform a large leap.

Her ballistic path brought her even higher. As the Ariake prepared to open down below, the Orei Nero ether light erupted upwards on either side of the ship. Its bluish-white light shined on her from below.

"...!"

She started to fall. She could see the city. Musashino had quite a few student dorms. Its surface had been one of the first places restored after the remodeling began.

...That must be nice.

She started vainly wishing Sanada had a regulated city of this size and she

smiled at the approaching elementary school roof and city. And...

“...Okay!”

She landed on the roof of the elementary school built on a raised area at the back end of Musashino’s surface.

To escape the impact, she activated buffer spells on the soles of her shoes. She looked back to confirm the metal arm holding Yuri was still with her. After noticing Yuri looked dizzy, she moved forward.

She leaped from the elementary school to the schoolyard.

And she saw people surrounding the schoolyard.

...Musashi’s guard unit!

That guard unit was primarily comprised of students from Mikawa. They worked for the Vice Chancellor and they all wielded swords, spears, or rifles.

“Fire...!”

Metal bullets flew her way as soon as she landed.

She raised her guard. She smashed the bullets with the metal arm and swung her arm inside it.

“I’m well prepared!”

Something burst from the elementary school building behind her.

They were dolls which shattered the windows and spread their limbs in midair. The materials and components brought in to reinforce the elementary school had been used to create at least 200 dolls. They were all autonomous and they began a charge.

But Isa herself did not stop. She continued running.

“Sorry.”

With that quiet apology, she let Yuri escape.

The metal arm holding Yuri was launched diagonally to the right, taking it toward the large duct opened to let air into the Ariake.

The metal arm was launched approximately 2 km. Yuri saw something as she flew in the arm's grasp and sank into a high-acceleration blackout.

Isa and the dolls were charging the guard unit that had been briefly distracted by the launch of the arm.

...Isa!

The guard unit had showed an opening, so they were lifted from the ground when the 200 dolls collided with them.

Then Isa charged in and thrust a metal arm through them. Yuri heard the usual roar of impact and Isa even swept Mikoshi Nyuudou's one-eyed ether cannon across the enemy's front row of defenders. Light sprayed out and burst.

...Isa.

Please be safe, thought Yuri. She watched the enemy being swept away while a double darkness filled her vision.

Not only was she blacking out, but she and Isa's metal arm had flown out of the Ariake and into the night sky.

Just before she completely passed out, Yuri heard a sound in the night sky around her. It was the sound of a massive amount of water exploding.

The bottom of the Ariake had opened and the Musashi had dived down and out into the sky.

Chapter 80: Pursuer of the Age



さあ
いこうか
配点 (再発進)

第八十章

『時代の追撃者』



Now

Shall we go?

Point Allocation (Takeoff Once More)

Cascades of light spread through the air.

There were eight in all and the light explosively erupted from the bottom of a white surface in the night sky.

The light originally formed a long straight-line jet from east to west, but it eventually spread out into a plane.

“This is ‘Ariake’ with a report. ...I will assist the Musashi’s downward departure. After fully isolating your privileges, please board the Ariake’s ejection spell. Over.”

“This is ‘Musashi’ with a report. Upon our downward departure, the Musashi shall isolate all privileges. Then we shall board the Ariake’s ejection spell. Over.”

Two voices overlapped as an especially large cascade explosion appeared.

Light bloomed, sound shook, and it descended from the bottom of the Ariake.

With metallic sounds and the sounds of the atmosphere being pressurized, water sprayed out as it was pushed out of the way and the long black bottoms of eight ships appeared in the sky.

“Musashi here. We will now officially be named the Musashi Mk. 2 and will continue to be referred to as the Musashi. Over.”

A buffer spell transformed the splitting of the pressurized air into the sound of a wave. And as the glowing Orei Nero trailed down into the sky, the black and white ships came into view.

“Musashi here. We will now leave the Ariake. Over.”

The giant ship passed below the bottom of the Ariake.

At the same time, air rushed into the Ariake to make up for the massive volume of the Musashi.

“Ariake here. We have confirmed the Musashi’s departure. Beginning recoil buffering. Over.”

Metallic noises and spell sign frames coincided with the Ariake’s ceiling lowering. The composite truss frames folded down to push at the internal air and prevent the external air from rushing in.

As a result, the inner and outer air collided at the bottom entrance which acted as the largest vent, and a massive water vapor explosion formed a horizontal ring between the Ariake and the Musashi. The Orei Nero was caught in it, so a halo of ether light covered a vast area in the night sky.

Further motion was underway below that glowing ring.

While descending with the rear slightly lower than the rest, the Musashi opened the parts needed for gravitational cruising and reached the altitude needed to end its descent.

“Ariake here. Opening Musashi spell catapult Great Path of Wisdom Ver. 42.”

1200 torii-style acceleration spells large enough for the Musashi to pass through opened along a guiding path to the west.

“Destination: Novgorod, Sviet Rus. Adjusting for curvature of the earth. Adjusting for residual inertia from the Ariake to the Musashi. Observable Far Eastern weather until destination: good. Estimated final margin of error: less than 200m. Please make your own adjustments for this failure. Over.”

“Musashi here. That self-adjustment is plenty. Thank you for your excellent guidance. Over.”

And...

“Continuing to descend. ...Beginning gravitational cruising in 37 seconds. Over.”

A falling figure spoke about the mutual understanding of the giant structures far overhead.

“Anayama...!”

It was Nezu. He lowered the effects of his fall buffer spell into the danger zone and let his body sweep northward, where Yuri had been thrown.

“Why isn’t Isa jumping down!? The Musashi has left port, so shouldn’t she jump off the side already!? Why is she still fighting!?”

“It’s simple. Just like with Yuri-kun, a ninja is not done until their job is complete.”

Anayama was unseen, but he could be heard.

“Her role was destroying the Musashi. There is a reason for her to stay there beyond simply seeing her sabotage take effect.”

“A reason!? What possible reason could there be!?”

“Surely you understand. To prove we are not Unneeded and to carve our names into history.”

Just as he said that, a noise came from various parts of the Musashi. The towing belts that held the ships together had been fired from ejection devices and then linked together. And...

“Musashi here. All ships beginning synchronization. Over.”

As the giant structure pushed down on everything in its descent, it filled with light.

And that was not all. Nezu heard one odd sound.

“Is that...”

Something had been launched from an Engine Division ejection device on the rear of Musashino.

Based on the volume of the sound, something very heavy had been launched. And based on the timing...

“The 6th Special Duty Officer’s Four Sacred Beasts God of War!?”

In the wind of the descending Musashi, Isa collided with a power dropping from the sky.

She was in the elementary school schoolyard at the rear of Musashino. She was in the center of the heat after using Mikoshi Nyuudou's cannon to set fire to the broken dolls made of wood and other building materials.

She faced a female god of war wearing vermilion armored clothing. And its name was...

"So you're here, Jizuri Suzaku!"

Isa stored the left metal arm (the pair to the one she had launched with Yuri) in the air. To replace it, she summoned another arm, but this one had a spike on the end.

"My rock drilling arm!"

The tip could be ejected as it spun, adding three meters to the arm's reach. But as the 6th Special Duty Officer on the heavy god of war's shoulder stepped back...

"Go, Jizuri Suzaku. This is my old school. ...But I'm not a kid anymore."

The god of war instantaneously rushed past the steel spike on the inside.
...That was fast!!

No, this isn't speed, thought Isa. The girl had drawn her in, ducked below the spike attack with the smallest possible movement, and then moved forward. Ducking down had briefly put her behind the spike and thus made the next movement look so sudden.

It was a lot like a ninja technique, but Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer was not a ninja. She used grappling techniques, martial arts, and...

"Dance, right!?"

"I've always helped that idiot with her choreography and worked part-time at Asama's place, so I've picked up a fair bit."

She sounded bored, but she was already right in front of Isa. Isa had no god of war. She was only a person. So targeting her would require the Suzaku to crouch down, but...

...It didn't lose its balance!?

A deafening sound followed.

Naomasa sensed how troublesome this opponent was.

Her own attack had been made with the best timing for a first strike, but...

“...Because she’s so low to the ground!?”

Isa had summoned yet another metal arm. Instead of a spiked arm, this one fired a mallet-like hammer. Both types were likely meant for clearing and cultivating land.

...Weapons with their roots in normal life, huh?

Isa had crossed the log-like arms in front of her to block Jizuri Suzaku’s attack, but it was not the weapons that made Naomasa think she was troublesome.

“Hey, you...” said Naomasa. “You were planning to go right on in to Musashino’s engine division, weren’t you? If you used those metal arms to break through the long block elevator in front of the elementary school, you’d have a straight shot there.”

It was obvious what Isa wanted to do there, so Naomasa asked a different question.

“Why are you willing to go that far in your fight?”

Isa was illuminated by the flickering flames around her. Just like the metal arms, her own arms were crossed in front of her face, so Naomasa could not see her expression. But she did hear her voice.

“You wouldn’t understand. And I don’t want you to understand.”

With those words, something fell onto the schoolyard.

It was dark. It was absorbed by the schoolyard sand and spread out slightly. It was spilling from her body.

“My name is heavier than the blood I shed.”

“I see. But just so you know...”

“Oh, I know. My sabotage was found, wasn’t it?”

“Judge,” confirmed Naomasa. “I suppose this is going to end badly for you.”

“Are you going to capture me and have me tell you how to remove it?”

Naomasa did not answer that. Instead...

“That would be one option.”

She attacked.

Metallic sounds scattered and sparks rang out.

Momentum cried out and a voice controlled the motion.

The elementary school schoolyard was essentially a plaza and Isa fought Jizuri Suzaku there.

She immediately turned attack into defense and broke her own defense to make an attack. She had summoned six arms. She tried to grab the Suzaku with the normal ones, pierce it with the spiked ones, and strike it with the hammer ones.

But she could not catch the Suzaku. It deflected the arms, dodged the spikes, and guarded against the hammers.

However, it was the same for her opponent.

They had less than 30 seconds until the Musashi had to shift into gravitational cruising.

If she lasted that long and there was no explosion in the engine division, she would have to either break into the engine division or destroy the Musashi in some other way.

The Musashi was currently descending and boarding the spell catapult created by the Ariake.

The catapult would send the Musashi forward and accelerate it. Once it was launched by the catapult and the acceleration became inertia, the Musashi would open up its gravitational accelerators for further speed.

Isa’s sabotage would activate when the ether fuel was sent to the gravitational accelerators. She had chosen the accelerators carefully and

sabotaged the linking ones, so if they forcibly stopped the sabotaged accelerators for fear of an explosion, it would render most of the other accelerators unusable as well. And if that happened...

...Musashino will lose its acceleration and the Musashi will collide with the atmosphere on the catapult.

That would damage the Musashi and their test voyage would be a failure. Even if they removed her sabotage afterwards, it would take time to recover from the damage to their reputation.

The Musashi had two options: explode or lose their acceleration.

Isa only had to last another 30 seconds to see that through.

After those 30 seconds, she could watch the result with pride. Whether they exploded or lost their acceleration, she could say for sure that she had done that.

She had to advertise to the world that the Sanada Ten Braves had left their mark on the Musashi.

...We need to show them that we have the power to do that!

“———!”

She was hit and she could tell strength was spilling from her body.

She was being defeated.

It was Musashi's 3rd and 4th Special Duty Officers. The Weiss Hexen's final guided shot had not lost its homing ability even after she deflected it once. She would normally have easily dodged it and counterattacked, but then the Schwarz Hexen fired a shot.

She let Mikoshi Nyuudou's one-eyed ether cannon handle counterattacking and she dodged, but it was too late.

The first shot pierced her side. If she could heal herself, it would only have been a minor injury, but right now she was running and fighting.

...Dammit!

She was weakening. While exchanging attacks, she pulled a pain relief charm

from her seven emergency tools and slapped it onto her sleeveless arm. The spell used a heightened subcutaneous effect, so after her heart pounded hard in her chest just once...

“...!!”

The pain vanished. But to make sure the pain reduction did not dull her senses, it also strengthened her senses. It was based on her vision and hearing and it worked by increasing the reaction speed of her nervous system.

The flickering of the surrounding flames grew a fair bit slower and the contrast between light and dark grew more distinct.

...Honestly...

This isn't like me at all, thought Isa. But...

“I'll be the first one...”

If they were to ask this age of warring states about themselves as the Sanada Ten Braves...

If they were to ask the world about themselves as new identities rather than the Unneeded...

“I'll be the first one at our destination...!”

After producing its effects, the charm scattered into light and vanished. At the same time, Isa gathered her strength once more.

How much of the 30 seconds had passed?

The sign frame controlling the metal arms said 18 seconds had passed.

Time was moving so slowly. What was she supposed to do for the remaining 12 seconds?

In 12 seconds, the Musashi would begin its acceleration. It would not look right for her to be blocking an attack when that happened. If anything, she wanted to be winning. So...

...It's so slow.

She took action as if to count down the exciting seconds.

Naomasa sharply narrowed her eyes.

...She's coming for me!

Her enemy had pressurized herself. She had used a charm for a quick and decisive battle.

Naomasa did not question the fact that the enemy was borrowing power from something else. Naomasa herself was borrowing Jizuri Suzaku's power and ninja like Isa were known for using any means necessary to accomplish their mission.

12 seconds remained.

On the 1st second, they exchanged blows and Isa moved forward.

On the 2nd second, Isa swung her body and sent all three right-side metal arms forward.

On the 3rd second, Naomasa made a trio of attacks on the right. Suzaku's left shoulder deflected the metal hand, its left elbow deflected the spike, and its left wrist deflected the hammer outwards.

On the 4th second, Isa swung her entire body to the right and launched her three left-side metal arms straight toward Naomasa.

On the 5th second, Naomasa dealt with those. A hook from Suzaku's right wrist deflected the metal hand and an inward spin from its right elbow deflected the spike.

"..."

On the 6th second, Suzaku turned its right side forward to dodge the hammer, leaving Isa with no way to attack.

On the 7th second, Suzaku's right arm threw a smash uppercut toward Isa.

On the 8th second, Isa held up charms in each hand. There were more than ten in all and she slapped them all onto herself.

On the 9th second, Isa received the blow with her flesh-and-blood body. Wounds opened across her body and a mist of blood sprayed out.

On the 10th second, Isa smiled and swung her right arm.

“Ahhh!!”

She summoned a metal arm. It was the opposite of the one that had thrown her companion. This was her final arm. It mimicked the swinging of her right arm and tried to grab Suzaku’s arm. And...

...Here it is!

On the 11th second, light filled Mikoshi Nyuudou’s ether cannon. It was going to fire just as it grabbed Suzaku’s arm.

On the 12 second, it was all over.

During the final second, Isa realized she had suddenly stopped moving.

She did not understand. But the movement of her right arm was linked with that of the metal arm trying to grab Suzaku’s arm and her own arm seemed to have caught on something, preventing it from moving. So...

...!

Isa forcibly completed the swing of her right arm.

She saw something flying to her right. It was a forearm that seemed to belong to an automaton.

She did not understand why something like that would be holding her arm in place.

But Jizuri Suzaku was already moving to dodge her metal arm.

She could not let it escape. The ether cannon was already targeting the 6th Special Duty Officer. So...

“Fire...!”

Just as she fired, a gust of wind leaped between her and her enemy. The wind took a form familiar to Isa.

It was a work tool. It was a hammer. And the boy who held it raised his voice while producing a water vapor explosion around the hammer.

“Hunterrerrrrrr chance...!!!”

Without her right forearm, Kanou watched Yagyuu counterattack the ether cannon with his hammer.

Yagyuu was short, but he had physical strength to spare. As their bodyguard, he hid in the shadows, but he made sure to train his body. And most importantly...

...He is loyal!

Yagyuu of the Public Morals Committee had been the first to notice something was amiss after the Musashi's remodeling began. It was only an intuitive sense that the flow of people was somehow off, but he had trusted that their job was meaningful and he had reported it to Kanou, his superior.

They had considered working with the Chancellor's Officers, but working too closely with them would have seemed odd to the people once they began the special student general assembly. So Kanou had asked Yagyuu to investigate the issue and to protect the current Student Council and Chancellor's Officers.

When the 1st Special Duty Officer had arrived after completing the investigation at the site of the attack on the Secretary, he had to have noticed Yagyuu's presence. What had he thought of Yagyuu when the boy continued to hide?

Yagyuu had needed to protect those officers without being mistaken for an attacker.

He had trusted in and followed Kanou and Ookubo despite their secrecy, but how stressful had he found his inability to tell those third years anything?

That was why Kanou had suggested that boy go with the 6th Special Duty Officer when she had left to intercept Isa.

And as a result...

“First Year Yagyuu Munenori! Here I go!”

This was the truth he had been unable to reveal.

This was the thought he had been unable to voice.

This was the strength he had been unable to release.

He let it all out and raised his voice. Strength filled his eyebrows and he bent his eyes.

“You moron...!!”

His blow overpowered the cannon of light. He let the piercing impact spin him around, and...

“Ohhh!!”

He brought down the metal body and head of Mikoshi Nyuudou that supported everything behind Isa.

Isa had no idea what had happened as Mikoshi Nyuudou was knocked through the air, and...

“Hit her, Jizuri Suzaku!”

Kanou saw Suzaku’s left hand held in front of Naomasa.

...Is that...?

That pose was clearly protecting Naomasa from the ether cannon blast, but something was off about Suzaku’s movements. Kanou thought she knew what that was.

...Jizuri Suzaku protected the 6th Special Duty Officer on its own!?

There was no answer. Suzaku simply held its left arm out compactly and struck Isa head on.

Isa heard the sound of water being struck.

What is that sound? she wondered.

Then she realized it was coming from her own body.

She felt no pain thanks to the charms. She simply felt all of her wounds opening up from the powerful blow. And this new impact had caused blood to spill from her body.

...Oh, so that's it.

Blood had sprayed from her entire body like a wet rag thrown against a wall. But...

"The 12 seconds have long since passed, haven't they...?"

Once she thought that, her surroundings filled with light. Waves of light ran through the sky and along either side of the ship.

...The spell catapult is activating!

"Ha ha ha...!"

Isa laughed while pushing her arms against Suzaku's fist to peel her body from it.

"How'd it turn out!?"

As soon as she asked that, she looked up at the light overhead. There were Far Eastern sign frames there.

As accelerating pressure and inertial power filled the Musashi, a single person was displayed in the many sign frames that opened above the ship.

It was Ookubo.

She gently bowed and then spoke.

"The Musashi will now shift into gravitational cruising. But first, I, Representative Committee Head Ookubo, will lead the final inspection with approval from the current Student Council and Chancellor's Officers."

Which meant...

"At England, we had to repair the accelerators damaged during gravitational acceleration cruising. That incident left the Musashi unable to pull off any long-term cruising. So with the new Musashi, we must prove that we can wipe clean that humiliation. ...Thus, we will now use Musashino's port accelerators to train ourselves in effective damage to unneeded accelerators and in repairing them inflight. This has the approval of every ship's captain and we have taken the power adjustments into consideration, so it will not affect the coming gravitational cruising in the slightest. ...Engine Division Chief."

“Sure,” said the Engine Division Chief as he and his granddaughter were displayed on the sign frame. “Take it away, Hiro.”

“Judge.” Mishina Hiro’s cheeks were somewhat red due to nerves. “This was the task we were given. To be honest, some of it is kind of a cheat, but someone gave us this task.”

Namely...

“How much damage can we and the Musashi itself take...and keep flying? Can we keep going like normal even after taking all kinds of damage and destruction? So this is to the person who gave us this task, our taskmaster who is no longer a resident of Musashi. Are you listening?”

Hiro raised her eyebrows.

“Here is our answer.”

Ookubo saw it.

She saw the engine division’s greatest resistance.

“It’s time to get stubborn! The engine division’s job is to keep things moving! If they’re trying to stop us, then we need to keep things moving all the more! Do you know what that means!?”

“Judge!” A team leader raised his hand from the team in charge of one of the accelerators. “We’ve strengthened the sabotage devices! With the 12 of them linked together, it should have an effect similar to a direct hit from a 33cm low-speed cannon fired from 3km!”

“You didn’t half-ass this, did you!?”

“I used to mess with blasting explosives in an M.H.R.R. coal mine! I’m not gonna hold back when it comes to strengthening explosion spells!”

Eh? thought Ookubo.

...Strengthened? Ehh!?

“W-wait, Engine Division Chief. You’ve made the sabotage even worse? Um!”

“Well done!! Now help out, everyone!!”

He was not listening. He clapped his hands and Ookubo found herself joining in with the others. Then the Engine Division Chief smiled with just the right side of his mouth and spoke.

“Listen up! This is the perfect opportunity! A gutsy technician from Sanada tried to destroy our Musashi. You know what that means, right? ...Naturally, we want in on something that sounds like so much fun! Designs, management, and everything else are all made so we have plans telling us what to do if they break.”

Meaning...

“We can destroy the Musashi better than anyone. I mean, we’ve all stood on the side or back terrace and speculated what we’d do if this part or that part went boom, right? So let’s sabotage all those parts.”

Do you understand?

“Let’s do this thing.”

“...Judge!”

“The first bit of damage will be a recreation of the hit we took at England. Let’s do it. That’s the engine division’s greatest shame, so showing we’ve overcome it will prove this is the Musashi Mk. 2.” The Engine Division Chief showed off his teeth. “So I wanna see the Musashi blowing up! The Musashi Engine Division is willing to take that on! Let’s do this, everyone!!”

Ookubo heard them all respond with “judge!” Defense spell shields surrounded the sabotaged accelerators and the workers in charge of them covered their ears with soundproofing spells. They confirmed the explosion-resistant buffer spells and engine division power conduits were working, and then...

“The ether fuel supply is reaching the accelerators!”

“Judge! The Public Morals Committee Head girl was considerate enough to head on up. If we’re gonna break the rules, now’s the time!”

I’m the Representative Committee Head, so does it not matter that I’m here? wondered Ookubo.

Meanwhile, she heard the rumbling from the floor of the accelerators activating.

...Here it comes.

She tensed without even meaning to.

“The sabotaged accelerators will explode in 7 seconds! 6, 5, 4, 3, 2...!”

The explosion arrived at 0 on the dot.

As the Musashi began to accelerate along the catapult, the central ship of Musashino hopped up in a powerful vibration. A moment later, ether light sprayed out from the gap between the port gravitational acceleration wing and the ship proper.

The accelerators inside had exploded.

There were precisely 12 explosions.

The accelerators were surrounded by defense spells that acted as explosion-resistant shields. The explosion from the control device passed through the internal ether transmission pipe and permeated the engine. The entire machine became a powder keg and instantly burst into flames.

The explosion process worked perfectly. The ultra-high speed spread of the fire created a shockwave that pressurized inside the tiny passageway of the ether transmission pipe. The accumulated shockwave released its power on all of the various power release sections.

The accelerators split apart, starting from the acceleration power supply. They melted from the heat and they tore apart while spreading the shockwave outside. The heated metal fragments and the flames crashed against the inner surface of the defense spell shields. Before the sound, the shields glowed white and bent from the great burden.

“Here it comes!”

The next shockwave broke the shields.

The third and final shockwave from the 12 blasts directly hit the inside of the engine division.

The impact reverberated through that closed space. The temporary bridges giving passage above the power devices were knocked down and a few people cried out and jumped down. Then the flames raced and flickered across the floor.

“...!”

Alarms and fire sprinklers were activated on the ceiling, but inside the unending wind, a few accelerators were hit by the blast spreading through the ether transmission pipes, causing new explosions.

The wind became power and the flames grew stronger, but...

“Okaaaay!!” someone shouted.

As the sprinklers poured down, they got up from crawling on the wet floor, pulled down the upwards defense spell bandanna they wore instead of a helmet, and spoke.

“This is what it’s like!! Remember this, everyone!!”

On Musashino’s bridge, “Musashino” gave a small nod after checking on the management of the accelerating Musashi.

17 of the accelerators on Musashino’s rear port gravitational acceleration wing had been damaged. Of those, 14 were completely destroyed. The other 3 were less severely damaged. But...

“ ‘Musashino’-sama! Our port power output has dropped by 7%! And it is holding steady there for now! If that exceeds 9%, it will affect our acceleration. It is slowly dropping at the moment, but if the engine division can make some repairs...” The automaton in charge of engine division operations looked to everyone. “Depending on the progress of their repairs, we can continue our acceleration as is. What should we do, ‘Musashino’-sama? Over.”

“Musashino” gave another small nod. And...

“Reporting to all ships.”

On Musashi Ariadust Academy's bridge, Masazumi heard "Musashino" speak.

"After being launched by the current catapult, we will fly directly to Novgorod with gravitational cruising. Everyone, please enjoy our first flight in a while. Over."

After that, Masazumi saw the Musashino move.

It lowered back down after being kicked upwards by the blast.

...Can we do this?

"We can keep going even after Sanada's sabotage, can't we!?"

The Musashi answered her by pushing her forward.

They were moving under their own acceleration rather than the catapult's.

And then she saw a small form hop out of the bridge's ditch. It was a black algae creature.

"Masazumi."

"What is it?"

"Are politics fun?"

"Judge."

Masazumi quietly but immediately answered. The black algae creature looked Tsukinowa in the eye, nodded, and then said more.

"I think that makes me happy."

"What do you mean you 'think'?"

When she smiled bitterly, the black algae creature said something else.

"Then," it began. "That makes me happy."

Masazumi paused for a moment and then nodded.

"Thank you."

With that, the Musashi pushed even more on her back.

They were accelerating toward where they needed to go.

Yagyuu Munenori saw something come to an end.

He stood at the edge of the starboard schoolyard. He could see the entire elementary school schoolyard from there.

That schoolyard had been lit by flames earlier, but that fire was dying down and darkness was slowly falling over it.

The dolls fighting the guard unit on the outer edge were no longer moving. They became no more than parts and materials held together by strings and they collapsed onto the sand.

But there was still movement near the schoolyard entrance.

“Is that...?”

It came from seven giant metal arms. All of them had returned to the air in order to support a single figure.

The god of war in red armored clothing responded by pulling back the arm it had sent out low to the ground.

That left a single person. And...

“She’s so stupid...”

It was Isa. She was moving, but her shoulders were tensed and her movements were stiff. It felt like something else was moving her. Nevertheless, she was moving. She shrugged.

“Listen. That wasn’t all of it. I still have some explosion spells left.”

“Damn you...!”

Munenori breathed in and started forward.

Defeating this ninja was his job. He was protecting the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers now, but he would eventually support Musashi’s defenses in both public and private. That was the role of the Yagyuu family.

The later opinion of his provisional inherited name was not exactly great. The essence of what he did was accepted, but his role in hidden political conflicts was focused on more than his behavior or skill.

...It's an ugly job!

He knew that, so he had to be the one to do this. Their enemy was injured. She was likely near death and a single strike would finish her off. Yagyuu was the name for that role, and that meant him. But...

"Stop."

Someone ran out ahead of him. It was Kanou. She held her left arm out to the side to stop him and looked back over her shoulder.

"My life sign readings cannot detect any explosion spells. She is bluffing about self-destructing."

"What do you-...?"

Just as he said that, Yagyuu heard Isa laugh quietly. The ninja girl hung her head up ahead.

"Oh, so you aren't going to fall for it? Musashi doesn't make anything easy, does it?"

Because...

"Musashi's policy is to not lose anyone, right? So...I thought I could pretend to be blowing myself up to stop you by force and then make you lose something."

Isa lowered her laughing shoulders.

"I used up all of the explosives. The Unneeded really can't do anything right."

"Then are you prepared to be arrested?"

Isa shook her head and Yagyuu knew why. She had been shot, she had applied an excessive number of charms to her body, and she had continued to fight. So...

"I'm not going to last... I'm only still moving thanks to the dregs of the charms' effects."

Isa doubled over and coughed up quite a lot of blood, but she had a smile when she looked back up.

"Sorry. I don't want to die on the Musashi. Ninja are the 'grass' after all. So..."

“Are you leaving?”

“Testament. ...Good luck. Life on the Musashi was fun. I laughed a lot. I’ll be leaving as I see you off...as one of the Sanada Ten Braves.”

As soon as she said that, the seven arms opened a spell circle on the ground.

It was the same ejection spell that the engine division used to launch gods of war.

Musashino’s bridge was directly above her.

“Sanada Ten Braves! #4! Isa! Time to complete my final job as a ninja!”

The wind burst and the enemy flew up into the sky while seemingly embraced by the seven arms.

She flew straight toward Musashino’s bridge.

Naito was already prepared to intercept.

She had taken a standing sniper position on the vertical back wall of Musashino’s bridge and Naruze held her hips from behind to support her. But Naruze spoke when she saw Isa flying up from below.

Mal-Ga: “Chancellor, we will watch over a ninja as she returns to the grass and leaves us.”

Me: “Is she smiling?”

“Yes,” said Naito while lowering her Technohexen hat a little. And...

Gold Mar: “She must be glad she came to Musashi.”

“I see,” he said.

Me: “Then see her off. ...Tell her she never has to stop smiling now.”

“Judge.”

Naruze pulled a black knife from her hip pocket. It contained the M.H.R.R. national emblem and she held it backwards with the blade pointed toward herself.

Naito pulled out a similar white knife and held it toward herself as well.

They matched their timing and breathing.

“She who shows no resistance in the fight. She who turns her back is the worst of the Technohexen.”

They reverse crossed themselves.

“Nema. I accept that everything was in reverse.”

They placed their hands on the brims of their hats and pulled them down. Then Naito looked at the enemy approaching from below.

“...Herrlich.”

She fired. The coin bullet raced out, but something happened below Musashino’s bridge before it could reach the enemy.

The enemy’s life gave out. The powerless metal arms stalled and Isa was swept away by the wind.

Isa found herself in Sanada Academy.

It was a dark night and she was alone.

She found all of her injuries were gone.

And she wondered if something was beginning again.

It had been like this in the past. Long ago. They had fled their old home and ended up at Sanada Academy. The place was supposed to be a hidden village, so Sasuke had probably been irritated when he noticed it. It had felt like a challenge, so they had forced their way in.

...Back then...

When they had opened the entrance to the dimly-lit school building...

“When we went in, our teachers were waiting for us and welcomed us.”

Their soon-to-be teachers had not expected them to break through the defenses of the hidden village. They had been delighted to have successors for the Ten Braves name, so they had served a feast and provided a place to sleep.

There had been light back then, so Isa placed her hand on the door now.

When she opened it, there was light.

“—————”

In the final moment, the heartbeat that would be her last woke her up.

Isa saw something high in the sky.

It was a giant structure. It was the Musashi. It was leaving, it was great, and it was unshakeable. But...

...That's right.

“I must have done something to it...!!”

It was possible her attack had not had any effect on that ridiculous presence, but...

...With that attack, the Musashi made itself stronger!

That meant what she had done would be included in everything the Musashi went on to do as it made Far Eastern history. She had taken part in the great current of history. She could be confident she had intervened in the movements of the world. After all...

“—————”

She could see something. She could understand something. She saw the newly constructed accelerators and the parts that looked like a ram. She had not understood them when she saw them inside the Ariake, but she understood perfectly now that she could see it all at once.

She understood that the Musashi had most likely equipped itself with the greatest power in the entire world.

She smiled. This smile came from the heart because nothing could be more enjoyable.

Yes. Everyone. Nezu. Yuri. You don't have to worry about anything.

“We are on a joyous path!”

Isa walked through the school building's door.

She stepped into the light. She was welcomed in. She felt like there was someone there.

Was it her god? No, perhaps it was the parents she had no memory of.

She did not know. But for some reason, she felt overjoyed. She smiled and did not even think about looking back.

"I don't know how it'll happen, but I'm sure they'll be here eventually."

She walked in without closing the door behind her. Isa walked into the light with a smile on her face.

Yuri awoke to someone crying.

She saw the night sky and found herself lying in some grass.

...My injuries...

Parts of her body felt stiff. There were charms attached there. Her right hand was especially stiff, reminding her that she had broken it. When she got up, she found someone next to her.

"Nezu-kun..."

He was on his knees with his head lowered. And beyond him...

...Isa's metal arm...

Yuri knew what it meant for it to be here while Isa was not.

...And I can't detect Isa's life signs...

Someone else rested their elbow on the metal arm while looking up into the sky. It was Anayama. He was watching a giant silhouette flying into the western sky.

"Isa-kun did an excellent job."

"How!?" asked Nezu with a tremor in his voice. "We didn't...we didn't accomplish anything! How can you pretend that was meaningful!?"

"I'm not pretending." Anayama spoke slowly. "Isa-kun fulfilled her job as a

ninja. It isn't about the result. Do you understand? ...We can end this as Sanada ninja rather than the Unneeded."

Meaning...

"We are the real deal now. Isa-kun proved it. ...So Nezu-kun and Yuri-kun, we no longer need to worry about being Unneeded and how we ended up that way. Isa-kun made us the real deal."

Anayama spoke to Yuri who was at a loss for words.

"Now, we're about to face the pressure of having to continually prove that we're the real deal. It's time to find out just how easy we had it being Unneeded. So let's get back to Sanada to report back to the others. And..."

And...

"Musashi has started toward Novgorod. Let's head back so we can observe the battle between P.A. Oda, Sviet Rus, and Musashi."

At 8:21 PM, the Musashi flew west as if to pursue the Jurakudai. In Novgorod, a fleet of black galleys began landing from the southern sky.

For the history recreation, the center of Novgorod was Nanao Castle.

Nanao Castle originally belonged to Uesugi, but it defected to Oda before being taken back by Uesugi once more.

Shibata himself would not land on Novgorod yet. Shibata's forces would not land on Novgorod until after Nanao Castle was taken back by Uesugi. That would be the Battle of Tedorigawa in which they tried to take it yet again.

Someone else was sent out on the front line.

"Sakuma. ...It's me, Maeda. I'll be looking after things here along with Na-chan."

"Sure, sure. Nice to see you again. You only just got here, but it looks like the counterattack is about to begin. What do you want to do? Want some candy?"

A short girl in an M.H.R.R. uniform ran over to Toshiie on Novgorod's southern land port. She held out a tin of candies, so Toshiie bowed and took

two.

“Which one do you want, Ma-chan?”

“This one! This one!”

Matsu chose the red one, so Toshiie chose the white one. He popped it in his mouth while his summoned ghost warriors lowered something from his transport ship.

“...? Are those bags of flour?” asked Sakuma. “What are you gonna do with all of those?”

“That’s a little trick for defense. I hope I won’t have to use it, though. ...So what are you going to do, Sakuma?”

“Testament. I was sent over here after pursuing the Prince of Orange. But that let me meet up with Mori here, which is pretty amusing. I’m really thankful for that.”

Something approached behind her as she spoke. As it crawled out from behind a moored galley, the surrounding people instantly took a step back.

Instead of wearing an M.H.R.R. uniform, it was more accurate to say the approaching thing was wrapped in one.

“Mori, I see you’re as wonderfully tentacle-y as ever.”

“Ah! Lord Toshiie, are you one the front line here!? I-I’m honored!”

He looked like a clump of countless worms.

He was part of a tentacle species and Sakuma looked up at his three meter height.

“You must be cold here, Nagayoshi. It’s a lot different from the Dark Continent where Hashiba rescued you. You’re not going to get chapped, are you?”

“Ah, p-please stop that, Lady Sakuma! R-rub me like that and I-I’ll transform! I’ll get all hard! Ah, here it comes, here it comes! I can’t control this!”

“Wa ha ha! You really are hilarious, Mori!”

“Please stop.” Mori flushed with embarrassment, twisted his body around to take a step back, and used his tentacles to hide his full form. “I-I told myself I wouldn’t live a lewd life! Look, it’s cold, so I’m wearing wool caps on all the tips! Aren’t they cute? If my slime freezes, I can’t breathe through my skin after all.”

“Ha ha ha. You look downright criminal in those hats, Mori,” said Toshiie. “I thought Shibata was insane to give you the name Mori Nagayoshi just because we found you in a forest and you were really long^[5], but now you’re an entire wing of our main forces.”

“Well, you’ve all treated me so well... There’s a world of difference between life here and life when that Dark Continent evil god cult captured me and used natural drugs to control me and make me do awful things every day and night.”

“Want some candy? Oh, can you not eat them with that cap on?”

“Not to worry. There’s a hole at the very tip. Go right ahead.”

“Mori, you’re only making that look even more criminal, so I suggest keeping that hole closed.”

Sakuma flicked the candy into the air and Mori caught it. As she continued the process from different angles, one of the girls asked a question to the boys helping transport materials through the port.

“Can you do that?”

“No!!”

“Pft... Our guys aren’t even as good as some tentacles.”

“It’s biologically impossible!!”

Then Mori turned toward them.

“That’s right! Young lady, you should not expect the exact same abilities from entirely different beings. If you are looking for equality, then...”

Then...

“I suppose you need to look to something less tangible...like the heart.”

Everyone shouted their agreement, so Mori blushed and stiffened a little.

“Mori, just having you around is great, but how about we start our meeting?”

Sviet Rus will be here before long.”

“Th-that’s right! Lord Toshiie will-...oh, and Lord Sassa will be here later too, won’t he!? I-I’m so excited that I get to be on the front line with all of you...”

Mori embraced the top of his central mass with his tentacles as he followed Sakuma.

Instead of the city, Sakuma walked toward a plaza at the edge of the land port. When Toshiie saw that...

“Is Novgorod still not letting us inside the central city?”

“The hilltop city still has its gates closed with defense barriers on top of that. Marfa and her people have fortified the city hall. And the rumored world’s first academy is probably there.” Sakuma smiled bitterly. “As is the Prince of Orange who is going to spill the beans on our Genesis Project.”

“Wh-what an awful person!” exclaimed Mori. “I-I think that is just wrong! How can you give away something people are working so hard on? Oh, I just can’t forgive him!”

“Calm down,” said Toshiie while walking to the plaza for their meeting. “Once Tedorigawa begins, we can deal with that.”

And at 8:41 PM, a great quantity of ships from Sviet Rus appeared in Novgorod’s eastern sky.

In response, a fleet of black galleys began firing from Novgorod’s southern side.

The Battle of Nanao Castle had begun.

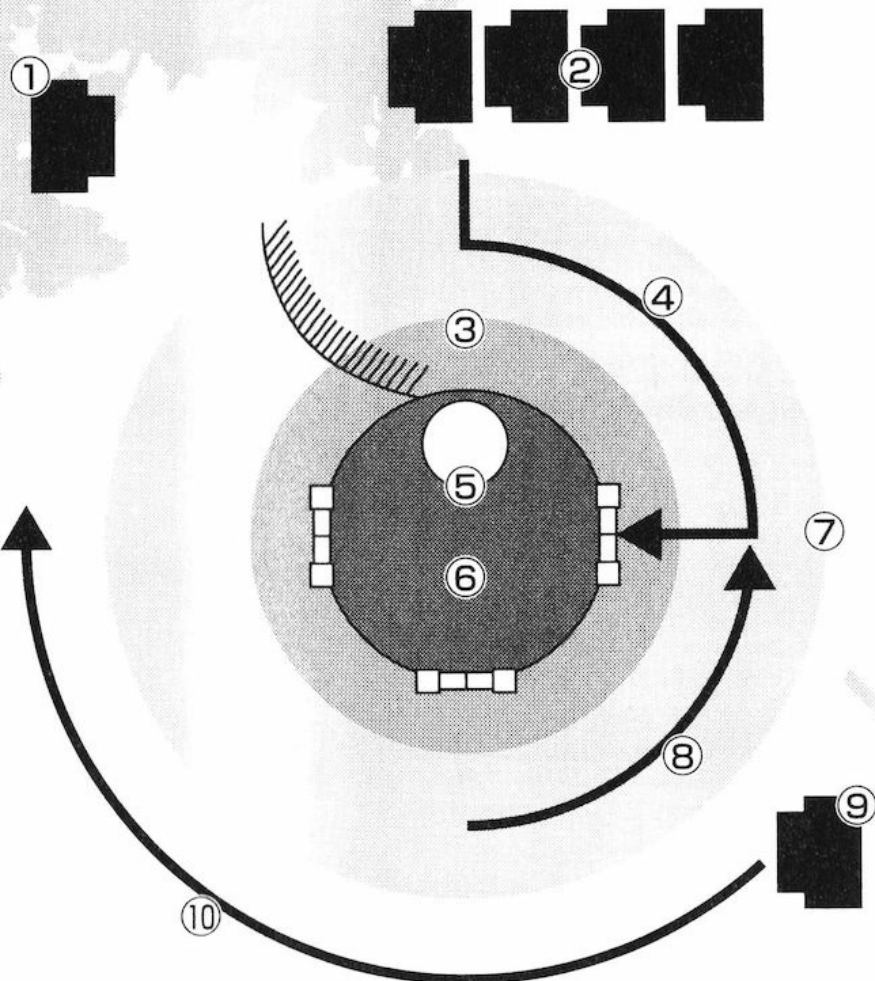
●ノヴゴロドの現状●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 俺達、上越露西亞の船でノヴゴロドに向かってるんだけど、全体的にどんな感じなんだYO!」



「フフフノヴ弟、現状、こういう布陣になってきてるわね」



① P.A.Oda佐久間の防御艦隊

② 上越露西亞の艦隊

左から第一艦隊(直江)第二艦隊(斉藤)
第三艦隊(景勝)第四艦隊(繁長・愚弟)

③ ノヴゴロド北陸港。西と南は崖

④ 上陸部隊の斉藤隊が向かうルート

⑤ ノヴゴロド市庁舎

⑥ ノヴゴロド市街

⑦ ノヴゴロド東の野原

⑧ P.A.Oda応撃隊のルート

⑨ 接近する聚楽第

⑩ 聚楽第の侵入コース

⑪ 柴田艦隊



「という感じ。上越露西亞は丘の上のノヴゴロド市街、その北にある市庁舎に到着する事で“七尾城の戦い”を終了させたいんだけど、北部陸港は崖のせいで市街に行けず、東回りになるわけ。

激戦区は東の野原だと思うわ。もし“七尾城の戦い”が終わっても、次の“手取り川の戦い”では柴田艦隊が乗り込んでくるから大変ね」



「その頃には聚楽第も迎り着いて大騒ぎかー。ワクワクトンガショーとか歴史再現的には無理だよなあ」



「どー考えても無理よ。ってか、上越露西亞艦隊の右側、遙か後方の東には、武蔵が駆けつけてきてるもの忘れずにね。遠くに艦影くらいは見えてるはずよ?」

Study:

The State of Novgorod

Toori: Sis! Sis! We're on our way to Novgorod on a Sviet Rus ship, but what are things like there!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Nov Brother, things are laid out like this.

1: P.A. Oda's Sakuma Defense Fleet

2: Sviet Rus Fleet. From left to right: 1st Fleet (Naoe), 2nd Fleet (Saitou), 3rd Fleet (Kagekatsu), 4th Fleet (Shigenaga and Foolish Brother) 3: Novgorod's North Land Port. West and south are cliffs.

4: Route for Saitou's Landing Team

5: Novgorod City Hall

6: Novgorod City

7: Novgorod's Eastern Field

8: Route for P. A. Oda Counterattack Unit

9: Approaching Jurakudai

10: Jurakudai's Invasion Course

11: Shibata's Fleet

Sis: There you have it. Sviet Rus wants to end the Battle of Nanao Castle by reaching the city hall on the north end of Novgorod's hilltop city, but the cliffs prevent them from reaching the city from the north land port and they have to circle eastward. The fiercest fighting should be in the eastern field. And even if the Battle of Nanao Castle ends, the Battle of Tedorigawa will begin and Shibata's fleet will arrive.

Toori: And I guess the Jurakudai will be there by then, making it all a giant mess. The history recreation is gonna make it impossible to have an exciting Tonga show, isn't it?"

Kimi: Yes, that's clearly not happening. Oh, and don't forget that the Musashi is approaching from far to the east to the right of the Sviet Rus fleets. You should be able to see its silhouette in the distance.

Chapter 81: Forerunner in the Sky

第八十一章

『空上の先駆け者』



恐れることなく
行く者と
迎える者と
配点 (奪い合い)

The one who goes

And the one who receives

Without fear

Point Allocation (Struggle)

A red light blossomed in the northern night sky.

It was fire. On the north end of a giant hemispherical floating city, the black P.A. Oda galleys defending on the west exchanged cannon fire with the blue Sviet Rus hulk battleships lined up from the north to the east.

The blue fleet was led by the Naoe Fleet which had giant *sankt oknos* displaying the Far Eastern character for “love” on their bows. Those armored ships were high mobility models with pressurization thrusters on the sides more than the back, so they led the fleet forward while seemingly taking steps to the left and right.

“Now! Give all your love to meeee!”

When Naoe blew a kiss from the bow of his flagship, the black galleys fired physical shells his way.

“Die!!!”

“Homosexuality is banned in Mlasi!”

“But polygamy is A-OK!”

The men on the black galleys shouted “That’s right!” while applauding each other and firing. With the sound of clashing iron and sparks, the blue flagship was gradually worn down. But as his flagship took the hits, Naoe oddly began doing squats.

“Lovely, everyone! Simply fabulous! Such a fabulous exchange of love!”

Sankt okno appeared across Naoe’s flagship.

“This is my ‘Punishment of Love’ spell that converts the energy of your impacts into power! ...We are told to turn the other cheek! And we are told to give generously to our neighbors. Our neighbors...!?”

The flagship flew out from Naoe's fleet and Naoe pointed at the P.A. Oda fleet with both index fingers.

"Would that be you!?"

Immediately, Naoe's flagship fired ether back from every last one of its cannons. They were aimed at precisely the galleys that had fired on it and the shells took advantage of being made from ether.

"Take my generous offering!! Ether shells of love shaped like hearts!!"

Several pink heart shapes measuring five meters across twisted through the night sky. The black galleys were pounded by one pink shell after another. The fragments after they hit were smaller heart shapes and they easily pierced the armor of the black galleys they hit.

And that was not all.

One of the black galleys retreating toward Novgorod's west side was falling behind the others.

"Master Kanetsugu!" shouted Naoe's aide. "That is clearly bait! They're trying to hold us back!"

"I don't mind! That means it is a present, doesn't it!?"

Naoe spun his arms, spread them, and struck a smiling pose with closed eyes and wrinkled brow.

A moment later, eight large spell shells fired from Naoe's ship. They formed giant heart shapes, they surrounded the slower ship, and they spun around it like a top.

"Heart Shock: Kanetsugu!!"

Naoe formed a heart shape with his arms, spread his legs, and lowered his hips.

Immediately, a heart of light exploded in the night sky.

"Isn't love fabulous!? It contains an unbearable power!"

But beyond the loudly sinking galley, the enemy fleet had changed form. They built a crisscrossing formation that acted like a wall on the west end of

Novgorod.

“Oh?” breathed Naoe. “You don’t plan to buy any time, but you want us to use up our ammunition. You want to hold us off in different ways while your fleet falls back. And you want to attack us to position our formation to the north and control our advance. Is that your plan? Since you’re choosing a defense that looks to the future...”

The corners of Naoe’s mouth loosened.

“That’s Sakuma in charge, isn’t it!? Does that mean Mori is there too!?”

Sakuma’s fleet watched Naoe as he was displayed large in the night sky.

He aimed his fingers at them in a matchlock gun gesture and winked.

“Baaaang...♪”

On Sakuma’s flagship at the back of the fleet, Mori spoke from an *insha kotob*.

“L-Lady Sakuma! Lady Sakuma! I-I don’t like him!”

“Yeah, yeah. Don’t worry about it. No one does.”

“Th-that doesn’t help! Wh-whenver I’m anywhere near him, he runs over and – just when I think he’s going to kick or punch me – he pulls out his spell bench and sits down right next to me!”

“Are you sure you don’t get along? It kinda sounds like you do.”

“I-I’m a guy! And I, um, decided I would live a life of p-pure love! That’s the only way I can recover from the trauma of that Dark Continent evil god cult capturing me and making me rape 24/7! This...this isn’t the same as an adorable relationship where you give each other a quick kiss first thing in the morning! This is wrong. I-I am going to m-marry someone who will kindly guide me in the right direction!”

“Why do guys always feel the need to give themselves excessive hurdles? As long as I can maintain my lifestyle, I’m not too picky.”

“Th-the greater the obstacle, the more exciting it is!”

“Then why not Naoe? Isn’t that a hell of a major obstacle? Am I wrong?”

“H-he’s a guy too!”

“Then go capture him and give him a sex change. Wouldn’t that solve it? And doesn’t that only make it a bigger obstacle? Or am I wrong again?”

“Hmm,” thought Mori while twisting around as if tying himself into about three knots. “S-sorry, Lady Sakuma, but it seems I’m just pretty conservative when it comes to love.”

“Is this really the time to start talking about yourself? Want some candy when we meet up again?”

“Oh, y-yes! I love the mint flavor! I feel so refreshed after eating it!”

The guys on the deck twisted their legs inward and stopped moving, so the girls...

“Is that how it works?”

“Again, we can’t do that!!”

Then a spell circle placed a defense barrier above the ship. The Sviet Rus fleet led by Naoe’s fleet had started firing on them as it circled north to land on Novgorod.

Occasionally, one of the enemy shells would reach Sakuma’s flagship at the back of the fleet. “Oh,” said Sakuma as she looked up at the shattering shell which had been fired with a great boom from the Russian fleet.

Then an *insha kotob* displaying Toshiie and Matsu appeared in front of her.

“Sakuma, Sviet Rus has managed to avoid a direct battle with Shibata’s fleet to the south, haven’t they?”

“Even if they keep at it like this, they’ll just have to deal with Shiba’s fleet later. They’re probably just avoiding that harsh reality for now. Or am I wrong?”

“Sakuma, what about Mayoress Marfa and the Chancellor Prince of Orange?”

“They still haven’t moved from the city hall. There’s a lot underground there, isn’t there?”

“Testament. It is a dangerous place.”

“I see,” said Sakuma. “I’ll use everything I can before passing it off to Shiba.

Although I don't have the same attack instincts as Kuki or Ichimasu, so I can't go on the offensive. But slowly wearing them down as a defender is more my style, right? Or am I wrong?"

With that, she looked to the Sviet Rus fleet deployed on the northern end of Novgorod.

"Now, let's see how much effort they'll put into this."

At the head of the Sviet Rus fleet, Naoe's fleet ascended into the sky north of Novgorod.

A shallow hill rose in the center of Novgorod. Ships were exchanging fire over that hill, but Naoe had something to check on.

...Why did they let us land so easily!?

Arriving on the battlefield meant going through two stages: movement and landing. Immediately after landing, they had few men and could not build much of a formation. They would normally be attacked at that point, but the enemy had already landed from the south while allowing them to land.

The northern land port was wide open, but Sakuma's fleet was slowly spreading out in the sky to the northwest of Novgorod. Sakuma was known for defense and playing the rear guard, so it was a slow but dense advance.

...Then...

Naoe shouted into a *sankt okno*.

"Ivan the Terrible! This is a trap! But should we go for it anyway!?"

"Heh. ...What kind of trap is it? Tell me..."

"Testament. It would be simplest to assume they are splitting us up between a ground unit and the fleet! If their ships begin firing, we will be unable to land or pick up the ground unit, but unfortunately for us, Sakuma-kun is a defense expert! The shellfire will drag on and on, so the ground unit will be unable to go anywhere! That would be a problem, wouldn't it!?"

"How clever of them... Defense can be so indirect. ...Can you deal with this?"

“Testament! ...Of course!”

“Then,” said an elderly warrior. It was Saitou, the commander of the fleet behind Naoe’s. “Allow me to be the first to land on Novgorod!”

“So Naoe-san will handle defense while Saitou-san’s landing unit goes on ahead. They’re all terribly inefficient with their excessive focus on attack, but they’re trustworthy. They should be especially effective in a short-term battle like this.”

Shigenaga’s Fukushima Castle took the lead of the fourth and final Sviet Rus fleet. The diplomatic ship’s equipment had been swapped out to make it a defense ship.

The deck on which they held the *privet* was still flat, but the bottom of the sides had plenty of gun cannons sticking out horizontally with the deck acting as an umbrella.

Shigenaga asked a question of those behind her as she viewed the shimmering of the cannons’ standby heat rising from the slits on the top of the deck.

“You’re waiting for the Musashi, aren’t you?”

She was answered by Musashi’s 1st Special Duty Officer. The ninja started with a nod.

“Even if we are to act as mercenaries, that ability is based on the Musashi. It would be difficult for us to act on our own while separated from it.”

The English princess and silver wolf stood behind him, but...

“Hm? ...Where is my king? And Horizon too?”

“Oh, you can see them here.”

The English princess’s sign frame displayed the ship’s kitchen where the crossdresser was swinging a metal pot around.

“Okay! For today’s Boobs Cooking Show, we’re doing a cabbage dish. Russia pickles things to preserve them, so I’ll be mixing that with some chicken and

rice. Chowing down on some rice and getting that homemade flavor is great after returning from the battlefield, right? I'll even add in some sesame oil, so it'll preserve pretty well even if you just leave it out."

"Toori-sama, the salt is first, but how much should I use?"

"Oh, about three pinch-..."

The princess punched him and the crossdresser uttered a coquettish cry.

"I-if anything, isn't this when I'm supposed to grope your boobs!? Based on the show's name?"

"I have changed the name to Kitchen of Death. Now, tell me the exact amount of salt."

They all ignored what the glaring princess said with a wooden pestle in her right hand as well as the sounds of impact that followed, but the idiot finally spoke over the divine transmission.

"We'll have something tasty ready when you get back, so make sure you all do come back."

Kagekatsu laughed quietly on another *sankt okno* when he heard that.

"I look forward to it. Some Far Eastern food would be nice on occasion."

Viewing that as permission, voices rose from Saitou's fleet.

"славатоварищ...!"

"Oh?" said Shigenaga as her eyebrows rose.

"What was that 'oh?' for?" asked the silver wolf who walked up next to her.

"I thought Saitou-san was going to say 'glory to Musashi', but..."

He has said 'comrades' instead. Speaking to his men even after what Kagekatsu had said may have been Saitou's way of showing his embarrassment. But...

...He too was lamenting the stagnation of Oushuu and Sviat Rus.

Then he gave another exceptionally loud cry.

The vanguard had landed on Novgorod.

Unlike the fields on the south end, Novgorod's north end had a lot of warehouses to support the land port. But while it was well suited for landing, the south was blocked by a tall cliff, making anyone landing there the perfect target.

Due to the cliff, the landing unit could not advance south to the city and had to choose the eastward path. And when they did...

“———!!”

P.A. Oda began firing on the landing unit from the slope of the hill on the east end of the land port.

Shigenaga raised her right hand in response.

“Begin covering fire, comrades!”

Sakuma's fleet provided a thick defense in the western sky while the enemy's counterattack unit was moving toward their landing team from the east. Cannon fire erupted from Sviet Rus's main fleet to the north.

The battlefield's initial preparations were complete and they were shifting to the next stage.

For the first shift in the battlefield, Sviet Rus's warriors advanced with Saitou Tomonobu in the lead.

Their destination was Novgorod's city hall. Arriving there would mean they had retaken Nanao Castle.

They were headed east. Novgorod's northern land port was a wide open space with many warehouses, but that had dug deep into the hill to the south, creating a cliff.

Reaching the central Novgorod city hall directly from the north would be difficult.

Sakuma's fleet was holding the sky to the west, so Saitou had one option: “Circle around to the east!”

Saitou was the oldest of Sviet Rus's current warriors. Since he was human

rather than a demon, he knew he could not match the demons in years, but his advanced age had taught him when to quit and when to give it his all. Not only did he have that 'youthful' thinking, but he felt he thought differently from the naturally powerful demons.

And the instincts that gave him had allowed him to survive otherwise deadly situations on a few occasions.

This was the same.

"Saitou-sama!"

His men were falling behind him as he ran.

He could tell why when he looked back with a bitter smile. The enemy's counterattack and their allies' covering fire were both exploding up ahead and all around them.

Stone was shattering and dirt poured down like rain.

Even demons could be driven by fear when immersed in the night. So...

"C'mon! C'mon, you little kids! Why are you letting an old man like me out ahead? What happened to all that bragging you do on the training ground?"

He worked to keep his tone light. And if they could not accomplish that...

"Come with me, kids! ...My legs are shorter than yours, but it looks like they can take me farther and faster than yours. I'll take the lead for now, so follow me!"

"T-testament!!"

He received a response, so Saitou's expression changed as his hair fluttered in the explosive blasts.

His smile lost its bitterness and he nodded.

"Then...let us do this."

Saitou's warriors led the first landing unit as they fulfilled their role as an assault unit.

Saitou led the charge down the coastal route from north to east Novgorod.

It was a ruined early summer field which had originally been a wheat field.

The wheat and wild grass had grown to knee height and the night wind blew across it.

Saitou continued through it.

When he stepped on the grass, he pressed his feet backwards. That knocked the grass back, prevented it from interfering with the movement of his legs, and pushed him upwards as when it sprang back up.

An M.H.R.R. rifle unit, a P.A. Oda firing unit, and a few gunner ships that Sakuma's fleet had sent to the east all had the same plan: "Aim...!"

Illumination spells rose into the night sky above Novgorod.

But as the illumination drew white lines behind them, they only lit up Saitou. He had temporarily run out ahead of the others so they would not be targeted and he charged into the counterattack units from the right.

"...!"

There was no time to speak or receive the word "fire". They had to react instantly.

The M.H.R.R. rifle unit was unlucky because they wore mobile shells to solidify themselves for firing.

The P.A. Oda firing unit was unlucky because they had prioritized maintaining a light weight and were only equipped with short swords for a close-range fight.

As soon as Saitou charged in, something expanded from his back to behind his right arm.

It was a folding screen made from four panels. And the picture...

"Zhong Kui."

That was a demonic warrior from the continent. He was said to drive out evil and people prayed to him for victory, but...

"I suppose only one should be enough."

The folding screen's picture flew.

No, each panel was removed as thick rectangular blades and Saitou held the hilt at the bottom.

“———”

He ran and made four attacks which slipped through the air with no resistance.

Saitou continued forward, and...

“Impurity begone.”

Immediately, a series of destruction and cutting occurred behind him.

The defense of the M.H.R.R. mobile shells was useless against the thick blades and P.A. Oda's lightweight equipment was no help in dodging the blades.

And when Saitou gathered the folding screen sword back together in his right arm, there was no blood on it.

But the line of counter-attackers raised their defenses as he ran forward. The enemy had more than one formation. Shellfire from the ships flew his way. They had used the previous illumination rounds to lock on, so they fired an army's worth of attacks toward Saitou.

All he did was run.

He seemed to fly above the grass while occasionally bending backwards and spinning around.

“Toh.”

With just a few light movements, he dodged every last bit of it. Then those following him only had to follow his footprints.

“Hey...”

One of the demon students running full speed behind him managed to speak up despite being entirely out of breath.

“Why can't they hit us or Saitou-san...?”

“He is the Zhong Kui of Echigo.” Said another while gulping. “He is Zhong Kui,

the warrior who drives out evil. ...Through his age and experience, he just has to look at the battlefield to know where the enemy is, where they will attack from, and where to attack them from. Even at night, Saitou-san can see everything..."

And that went beyond himself at this point. If those following him were also safe...

"They say with age you learn when to give up, but how far ahead can he read the battlefield?"

Saitou ran steadily along ahead of them.

And when he reached the enemy's second formation...

"...!"

Shellfire tried to pass by him on the right.

He would not need to dodge far to let it pass him by, but if he did that, the blast would hit those following him.

And that was why he took action.

He leaped high in the air, spun like a top, and expanded his folding screen sword. Instead of splitting it into four, he constructed an extra thick blade with two of them front to back and two of them side to side.

"Take this."

A smooth side swing split the ship's attack.

The shell continued on, seemingly unaware it had been sliced in two until the air got in the slice and it floated up.

"Break apart."

The shell hopped chaotically through the air, separated into two pieces, crashed into the atmosphere, and broke apart.

Saitou used the blast to leap into the enemy's second formation from diagonally above them.

Instead of sweeping the enemy away, he simply sliced through them, and...

"Vice Chancellor!"

The corner of his eye glanced into the night sky and he gave a shout.

“Sakuma’s fleet is moving in the west!”

A fleet was arriving from the western sky in order to separate them from the unit landing after them. It was the galley fleet commanded by Sakuma. It moved slowly, but its presence grew like a great cumulonimbus cloud. However...

“Well done.”

Saitou commented on it as he cut through the enemy formation.

A moment later, red flowers bloomed in the night sky where Sakuma’s fleet flew. A few of the P.A. Oda galleys had burst into flames and exploded.

He knew what had caused these midair flames.

“Shigenaga’s fleet has begun a *privet*, hasn’t it?”

“Very interesting. Don’t you think, Toby?”

A white hallway was made from white birch wood.

It was part of the white birch city hall building on the hill of central Novgorod.

Someone was looking out of its northward-facing windows.

“Lady Marfa. ...P.A. Oda’s Sakuma fleet is taking damage.”

“Of course it is. War is a game of subtraction. Both sides bet everything they’ve built up and, if you screw up, you can either get stubborn or pull out. That’s all it is. Given P.A. Oda’s great national power, they can afford to lose a fleet here. Sakuma has inherited the names of both Nobumori and Morimasa. That means she’s both the ‘Retreating Sakuma’ and the ‘Demon Sakuma’. She isn’t going to think about escaping this unscathed.”

Marfa did not stop walking. A rumbling filled the sky and she smiled at being able to hear the exchange of blows and trumpet blasts from so far away.

“A wonderful sound. Such a wonderful sound. Leave it to Shigenaga to let us hear this at night.”

“Meanwhile, we have finished establishing our overhead defenses. We will

have a physical defense barrier over the city for the next seven hours.”

“So everyone who comes here will have to do it by foot and climb the hill, will they? This is reminding me of Sundays back when I was a kid. I would use every break I had to climb the hill to see if there was anything there, and I would always come back having gained something.”

“What kinds of things did you gain?”

“Everything that made me who I am now. Is that too realistic and boring?”

“No.” Toby shook his head. “That is a very poetic way of thinking.”

“That’s pretty poetic itself coming from someone who can’t read poetry.”

Marfa smiled a little, but that must have satisfied her because her expression grew flat.

“Toby, how’s our guest?”

“Testament. I sent him to the secret sector belowground. The key was a copy of yours, so it will only work this one time.”

“Not even I understand that place, so I wonder if he’ll know what it means.”

“Yes.” Toby tilted his head. “It was a strange place, wasn’t it? After all...” His voice was nearly drowned out by the blaring trumpets outside. “To think there was a continuation to the images that tell the story of the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project during the Age of Dawn.”

“Is that supposed to be imaginary, a symbol, or...something else? If our guest can answer that, I’d like to hear it. I can offer the answer up to the past mayors.”

“Testament.”

Toby walked out ahead of Marfa and gestured in a certain direction: the center of the city hall. The great hall there was a circular space filled with darkness. But the lights of the night shined down from the ceiling in the center.

Marfa walked there.

“Toby, open the door. We have guests coming, so we need to give them the warmest of welcomes. And then you...”

“Testament. I know my primary enemy will be here, but I have business I must hurry back to deal with.”

“One of your people died?”

Toby nodded his head.

“Based on the ascending light, they did a fine job of fulfilling themselves. ...So I must apologize. I had wanted to protect this place to repay you, Lady Marfa.”

“You’ve done enough, Toby. You brought in external information and preserved my connection to Kagekatsu and the others. According to the Testament descriptions, you drove out the Uesugi clan and you have done an excellent job of fulfilling that role. I have no interest in dragging someone into a conflict when they have somewhere they need to be.”

“You are most forgiving.”

Toby bowed deeply and Marfa reached out her hand. She pressed her index finger against his forehead.

“Take care.”

Toby answered by vanishing. There were no footsteps and the air did not move, but he left.

So Marfa smiled bitterly. She placed a hand on her hair and swept it into the chilly air.

“Now, Shigenaga is being her usual self in the northern sky. The battlefield is going to change soon. Yes...the winds will change.”

She shook her hair as she spoke and she maintained the bitter smile of having one of her people leave.

A moment later, a great noise from the northern sky filled the hallway behind her.

As Shigenaga’s fleet continued their *privet*, one of its ships collided with the air and was destroyed.

The ringing of metal, the explosions, and the reverberation of falling debris were all caused by one thing.

“A powerful, wide-range defense barrier. ...That must mean the Jurakudai has arrived.”

So...

“Niwa Nagahide of the Six Heavenly Demon Armies has joined the battle. This is about to get even more exciting.”

The fires of collision and destruction scattered through the sky.

The fleet of large hulks had had its *privet* rejected.

A Kraken-class ship measuring just below 800 meters had collided head-on with a defense barrier while upside down. The ship’s layered structure shattered as it shrank down to half its length.

Then the ship’s power flowed back into the rear engines. The engines exceeded their limits, the activated ether fuel flowed back into the fuel tank, and it all reacted at once.

“Abandon ship!!”

They had planned to abandon the ship and attack after the *privet*, and that proved helpful. They had been controlling the ship through spells on the deck, so they could all immediately run off the deck.

“Dammit...!”

The crew threw themselves into the air while illuminated by the giant defense barrier.

Then two things happened.

First, the Jurakudai arrived south of Novgorod.

And second...

“Okay, let’s continue advancing defensively! Let’s try it out! Isn’t that our only choice!?”

On Sakuma’s flagship, Sakuma spun her small body around on the bow of the deck. She pulled out a Catholic Holy Spell charm for a voice amplification spell and rolled it into a megaphone.

“Forward...!!”

With that, a gentle wind pushed on the entire fleet as the wall-like formation of galleys moved forward. The defense barrier sent from the Jurakudai was positioned ahead of them, so they could use most of their power for attack.

“Fire all weapons...!”

Sakuma’s fleet tore into the Sviet Rus fleet lined up in something of a straight line from north to east of Novgorod.

Sakuma’s covering fire and advance through the western sky slowly broke apart the Sviet Rus fleet.

But Sviet Rus did not flee. They were landing on the north end of Novgorod. Saitou’s landing fleet was made up of 12 Kraken-class hulks and it was destroyed by the 32 galleys of Sakuma’s defense fleet.

Even with a concentrated defense, they could not let up in their protection of the landing unit. So Saitou’s fleet was unable to move and was torn apart and destroyed by Sakuma’s fleet now that its power was focused on attack.

But Sakuma’s fleet did not move any further forward than necessary.

They maintained an effective firing range from Saitou’s landing fleet and did not move any further forward until Sviet Rus’s front line moved back.

“They like to play dirty, don’t they!?”

Shigenaga watched from behind Naoe’s first fleet, Saitou’s crumbling fleet, and Kagekatsu’s fleet in front of her.

“Chancellor!”

“Stay where you are, Shigenaga. Do you wish to shame Saitou with your worries?” Kagekatsu spoke from a *sankto okno*. “My third fleet will move to protect the second fleet. First fleet...Naoe, you move to destroy Sakuma’s fleet from the sky. That is an order.”

KageV: “Waaahhh! Saitou-san! Saitou-san! Are you all right!?”

Tomo-no-Bu: “Well, I’m behind the hill already, so I can’t actually see my fleet. I can only leave this to you.”

Love Man: “Ha ha ha! So I’ve got the best spot, do I!? I’m so popular!”

Shigeko: “For some reason, I feel like I’m missing out here...”

Saitou arrived on the east side of Novgorod’s central hill.

The P.A. Oda camp was to the south. The black galleys and groups of warriors in black M.H.R.R. uniforms could be seen in silhouette here and there. Occasionally, the moon-like color of a P.A. Oda uniform would come into view, but...

...That is a diversion.

Sakuma had likely come up with the formation. It was thick and was meant to draw the enemy in before firing, so it was just like “Retreating Sakuma”.

But, thought Saitou. The Jurakudai was a problem as it circled west from the southern sky. It was braking after its high acceleration, so the back end was still turning behind it a bit, but it was already effective as a defensive ship.

It had strengthened the defensive wall of Sakuma’s defensive fleet in the northwest sky.

And in the northern sky, the Sviet Rus fleet stretched east and west while it took fire and damage from the Sakuma fleet thanks to its strengthened defenses.

But...

...Well done, Kagekatsu-sama.

Naoe’s fleet was firing on Sakuma’s fleet from above. That was standard practice. If a fleet was to strengthen its defenses, it had to increase its density, so this would keep a fleet from expanding vertically. And a defense formation made from 32 galleys was no exception.

Of course, Naoe’s fleet was not doing any effective damage to Sakuma’s fleet thanks to the Jurakudai’s assistance, but the attack held Sakuma’s fleet in check

and prevented it from moving forward.

And while Naoe created that umbrella of shellfire, Kagekatsu's fleet moved to protect the landing unit at Novgorod's northern land port.

Kagekatsu's decision was shrewd because...

...He smartly abandoned my fleet!

Even the unharmed ships stopped at the land port had been abandoned. That would force the landing unit to evacuate onto Kagekatsu's fleet, but it also allowed the abandoned ships to act as a wall against Sakuma's fleet for the ground unit as well as a barrier if Sakuma's fleet wanted to land.

Even if some of the ships were unharmed, they could not afford to drag them along. By taking action early, Kagekatsu's fleet would be less damaged as they moved to protect the landing unit. And...

"Well done."

While Naoe's and Kagekatsu's fleets took action, Saitou saw a few more preparatory actions underway.

The enemy's forces were more than double theirs, but Kagekatsu had not given up on piercing them and he did not think that was impossible.

Then, thought Saitou. We must keep time moving.

By arriving at Novgorod's city hall, they could end the Battle of Nanao Castle.

They could take back Nanao Castle which had defected to Oda's side.

Kagekatsu had to understand what that meant. After all...

"That means to bring Novgorod back to Sviet Rus!"

To put it another way, Novgorod would oppose P.A. Oda as soon as they arrived.

And Saitou knew who had to want to move that along more than anyone:

...It has to be Kagekatsu-sama...!

Kagekatsu was forcing himself into a strategy of endurance. He forced himself to take the lead and receive the enemy's attacks.

Hm, thought Saitou as he stopped at the foot of the hill.

His men came to a stop about 100 meters behind him, but he gestured for them to not approach and he faced forward.

Someone stood there in Novgorod's eastern wasteland.

They stood on the path up the hill to Novgorod's city.

The westward path up the hill had been poorly maintained and was now covered in grass. Due to melting snow, accumulated dirt formed occasional shelves on the hillside.

The person in the grass stared straight at Saitou.

The woman wore her P.A. Oda girls uniform in a simple fashion. Cloth was wrapped around her body in places and around her hair, and she had the number "2" written on her uniform.

"I am Niwa Nagahide, #2 of both P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Armies and Five Great Peaks."

"I am Sviet Rus 1st Special Duty Officer...Saitou Tomonobu."

Saitou spread his arms a little and prepared for battle.

The wind blew through and the sounds of impacts reverberated across the sky. Niwa calmly looked up toward those sounds.

"Are you going to do this despite all that?"

"It is unavoidable."

"Shaja," replied Niwa. "Then-..."

Before she could finish speaking, Saitou charged forward.

He expanded his left folding screen sword. As a precaution, he had not shown this left one before, but now he swept it forward.

"...!"

He slid the blade forward and slammed it into her.

Chapter 82: Passer of the Royal Road

第八十二章

『王道の通過者』

行くなれば
ついていくより
越していく
配点 (充実)



If you're going to go

It is better to pass them

Than to catch up

Point Allocation (Fulfillment)

Colors raced through the darkness.

The colors came from a picture: the folding screen sword Saitou held in his left arm. The four panel blades were illustrated with Zhong Kui, they disconnected at the tip, and they rushed toward Niwa in the shape of four spread fingers.

It was a diagonal strike from inside to outside. Each of the blades had its tip set at a different height. Also...

“Take this.”

By pushing lightly at the base, the 2nd and 4th panels jutted out as far as an arm.

This provided enough reach while preventing the enemy from moving in close, so...

...It must hit!

Saitou's experience told him the third panel would slice through Niwa's body.

But the cut was shallow. The slice at the gut was only about 5cm deep. It would not even reach the lungs.

His Zhong Kui experience had also seen that coming, so Saitou spread four new panels on the right.

This one was from outside to inside. It crossed paths with the previous left attack, but all four of these were pushed in deep.

It reached, it cut, and...

“...!”

Saitou sliced through both Niwa and the grass and then drove both attacks

into the ground.

Saitou was confident that he had cut and sliced.

He had felt the tactile feedback, but he also looked to the enemy after making his twin attacks.

Niwa Nagahide.

She stood in front of him with her long hair blowing in the wind.

She was unharmed.

“That was a close one.”

One of the cloths wrapped around the end of her hair had been cut, so the stream of black was swimming through the air.

“But that helped me get it in, so thanks.”

His twin folding screens were digging into her feet on the ground. No...

...I bisected her from above, but she negated it!?

How did that work? He could clearly see her body in the darkness. It looked like she was surrounded by ether light, but that was not it. Nor was she a ghost.

...Is this...?

Some information on Niwa was released in the Chancellor's Officers almanac. He had also heard some stories from those on the same battlefield as her. And that told him her Combat Style.

“An Enchant Forcer!”

That Combat Style allowed a spirit or a Mouse to reside inside her to give her some power or divine protection. Anyone working for a shrine or temple and any religion that allowed nature worship could do this to some extent, but Niwa took it to the next level.

Her ears had become animalistic and she had a tail. Her nails had grown and if they were not meant as blades...

“This is not just a possession! Is it a true body borrowing!?”

Instead of borrowing the power of a spirit or Mouse, she became the spirit or Mouse itself.

And this body borrowing was at a very high level. Saitou's folding screen swords were made to be "all-purpose" to accommodate his experience, so they had an anti-spirit divine protection. If not even that was working...

"High-level? No, I should assume this is at the Great Spirit class. And most likely a Raiju type."

"Yes," said Niwa as she pet the beast resembling a puppy or squirrel that appeared on her right shoulder. "This is the Raiju that caused trouble during the Heian period and was tamed by Watanabe Yoritsuna. What happens when you drive your sword into that would be outside the range of Zhong Kui's experience."

As soon as she said that, the folding screen swords burst.

Saitou's arms and fingernails also burst while the blood vessels swelled out on his hands.

"...!"

His arms split and ruptured all the way up to the shoulders.

This was an attack from the Raiju inside Niwa. Merely touching that thunderous roar produce a reaction and it had traveled back to Saitou from the blades.

Niwa saw warm bloody steam rising as Saitou lowered his hips.

While the old man tried to keep his legs from giving out, his gaze was still fixed on her.

But several lines had been gouged into his arms and the bleeding would not stop. He would not last long if he continued fighting like this.

But Saitou did not flee, so Niwa spoke without smiling.

"You should fall back. I'm not as rough as Shibata, so I'll tell you that much." Niwa shook her body a little as she spoke. "You noticed something odd when

you came across me here, didn't you? Why am I the only one at such a crucial position? ...You know why that is, don't you?"

She shook her body again. And a moment later...

"Ah...!"

Her voice carried and the shaking of her body flowed together into a dance.

"I offer this up via the wind to my Mouse Raiju, the great thunder spirit."

And "this" was...

"Original Spell: City Conquering Stage 'Surrounded by Azure Lightning'."

Everyone on the battlefield of eastern Novgorod – both those on Novgorod itself and those on the ships – could hear that voice clearly.

It was a singing voice, but it was shaking and uncertain. And as it progressed, the atmosphere changed.

A light appeared in the heavens and dropped down toward the earth.

The ether lightning attack descended like wings. It either fried or stopped those racing across the eastern side of Novgorod to climb the hill, and...

"Turn away!!"

The lightning also struck the Sviet Rus fleet trying to fire on the land from the sky east of Novgorod. Instead of washing across the ship, it wrapped around it and destroyed the gun turrets where it scored a direct hit.

Niwa's azure lightning devoured the fleet like an all-consuming serpent. Also...

"Hey..."

A lookout spoke while checking on Novgorod with telescopic and night vision spells from behind defensive light.

"Send a signal to the landing unit! Tell them to take defensive measures immediately!"

As for why...

"The enemy has endless reinforcements coming in!!"

Saitou and the rest of the landing unit saw it.

Below the light of the racing and scattering electricity trying to consume them, the color white covered the base of the windy hill.

That white was not snow, stone, or white birch wood.

“Maeda Toshiie’s...terribly named ghost warriors.”

The wide base of the hill had grown entirely white, mostly thanks to the bestial ones that resembled giant apes. And as the lightning attack shattered the skeletons, larger skeletons stood up in their place. They grew in number and the rate of growth increased as the lightning raced through. But more ghost troops rose from the ground to quickly fill any holes in the army.

“Now, is anyone willing to try climbing to the top? I’ll root for you. ...Only as someone making it more of a challenge, though.”

Beyond the white, someone in a vermilion M.H.R.R. uniform stood at the base of the path up the hill.

It was Maeda Toshiie. He pulled a few silver coins from the coin roll sword at his hip and dropped them with a smile.

“The battle has only just begun. ...Surely you didn’t think it would be over already, right?”

“Commander! Please give us permission to disembark!”

In the sky within range of the lightning, Shigenaga heard her warriors on the ship while that racing lightning lit them from multiple directions.

The demon warriors with especially heavy equipment and defenses were gathered here.

Needless to say, not even they could stand up to a blast from a ship. That was why Saitou’s strike force had cleared a path first. Then these warriors and Kagekatsu’s unit would push into the secured land port and spread out from there. That had been their initial strategy.

But things had strayed far from the ideal.

Only two things were preventing them from frantically scattering at the moment.

...Kagekatsu's decision and Saitou-san's predictions.

It was best to trust in those two, and Shigenaga had something else to trust in.

So...

"We will remain here. We will continue to follow the Chancellor's orders, which means remaining here."

"Commander! But Saitou's unit...!"

"Trusting our comrades is just as important as saving them! In this frigid land...and on the deadly battlefield, trusting in each other's survival comes first, doesn't it!?"

But a light appeared as if to put a stop to Shigenaga's words.

It was at the base of eastern Novgorod's hill. A gigantic azure light appeared there.

Niwa had resumed her battle with Saitou's group.

The intense battle was filled with unilateral lightning attacks.

Niwa stood in the center and she walked with a rhythmic step.

"Ah...!"

She also raised her voice and swung her arms. They seemed to only sweep through the air, but several bolts of lightning would tear out horizontally the very next moment.

A scorching sound tore at the air and the scattering electricity and sparks definitely hit her opponents.

Several demons were struck by the lightning from straight ahead or from the sky and they were knocked to the ground as bright sparks flew. Their shells and muscles were strong against blows and blades, but the instantaneous heat and vibration burned them from within while their boiling blood caused their bodies

to burst. The demons had never experienced this sort of inner destruction before.

Those who received a direct hit cried out in a way they never had and could not fight the damage.

And once they were broken, the large bone apes and large skeletons rushed in at them.

Each of them could handle one of those. The demons, and especially those in Saitou's strike unit, had trained to increase their ability to break through enemy lines. They had also trained how to handle these skeletons based on the records from the Sack of Magdeburg, but...

"Dammit...! The lightning's in the way!!"

The lightning attacks rushed in from all around them and were nearly unpredictable. They sometimes fried the demons and sometimes just got in their way. Some of the demons were distracted, so...

"3rd Right Squad disperse! The 2nd will absorb you!"

Saitou's unit was shrinking.

Their overall numbers had already been cut in half, but they still did not fall apart because...

"Saitou-sama!"

At the center of them all, Saitou walked toward the path up the hill even as he lost blood. He could no longer even move his mouth to speak, so he was limited to his gaze and gestures. Still, he managed to accurately guide them all.

His feet were steady as he ran through the grass and his shoulders never forgot to rise and fall as the wind blew over them.

He dodged the descending lightning and moved to the shallowest part of the oncoming wave of enemies. His men did as well, but...

"Now, then."

A female voice spoke from behind them. It contained a smile and definite delight.

“Niwa...!?”

“The stage is set. Let me show you a true union with nature.”

A single cloth unwrapped from Niwa’s hair. This was the second one and it was a spell charm.

“Release Stage Limits – Second.”

With that, Niwa accelerated.

Her speed was different from her previous dancing. This was due to the light.

She had previously just been releasing and throwing the lightning, but now it appeared around her limbs and her elbows.

“By letting the power reside within me and making it my own, my attacks gain the speed of lightning.”

This was...

“Great Spirit Raiju Martial Arts. Is this inside your Zhong Kui experience?”

The demon elites who tried to protect Saitou were blown away in an instant.

And by the time Saitou turned around, Niwa’s fist was thrust straight toward the center of his body.

He had quickly used a folding screen blade in defense, but he heard both it and his sternum breaking.

Saitou flew through the air.

The man’s old bones could still move.

He tried to land on his feet, but he fell into the grass on his knees instead. The impact caused him to lean back and he coughed up the blood filling his lungs behind his broken sternum. But...

“Everyone, go on ahead!!”

Saitou swallowed the blood in lieu of breathing and gathered strength in his body.

...Just a few seconds.

He only needed a few seconds. Buying that much time would mean a lot on the battlefield.

If he could hold this monster back for just a few seconds, most of the others could advance a few steps, defeat many enemies, and approach their goal.

He would die eventually. So if that still unseen “eventually” was going to be here...

“I would like nothing more...!!”

Saitou coughed up more blood to lighten his body as he faced forward.

He could see Niwa. Or he should have seen her.

But his bloodstained and darkening vision saw something else.

He saw the white short sleeves of a boys uniform. The back of the uniform he saw was decorated with chains.

...It can't be.

Something impossible stood there. This person should not have been here.

“Musashi’s Chancellor and Student Council President...!!”

“Hi.”

The people on the battlefield heard a boy’s voice.

He gave only a brief glance to the ninja and silver wolf standing alongside him.

“Sorry, but it was looking like you were prepared to die, so the three of us got permission from Mary and Horizon and went on ahead. This is, well, Musashi’s policy and all. ...But that might not be enough to come all the way out here, so...”

The idiot smiled and looked out across everyone there.

“Let us join that promise of yours.”

No one nodded at that, but someone did move.

It was Niwa. She did not greet them or speak at all.

“———!!”

She used the acceleration lightning pressure in her arms to attack Musashi's Chancellor and President.

The 18 meter ball of lightning she fired was large enough to also hit the two standing at his sides and Saitou behind him.

As soon as the ball of lightning was launched, Saitou saw the color white move between him and the idiot.

It was Sviet Rus uniforms. The armored backs lined up like a wall.

“You...all...”

It was his strike unit.

Why were they protecting him instead of climbing the hill? But before he could ask, one of them spoke.

“We are the Saitou Unit.”

That was all.

And with only that, they tried to move forward. They tried to pass Musashi's Chancellor in front of them in order to protect everyone. But...

“Kh...!”

The lightning ball was faster.

Having been ordered to wait on her ship, Shigenaga did not call Saitou's name.

But she did shout at the Musashi Chancellor who had jumped down from the ship without asking.

“You fool!!”

Niwa's lightning ball burst. And as she saw its light...

...*Dammit!*”

Should she have gone on her own? Or should she have given her troops permission to disembark earlier?

But the English princess smiled bitterly next to her and Musashi's princess tapped her shoulder.

Wondering what this was about, she turned toward the automaton princess who spoke while holding the teacup the English princess had given her.

"Do not worry. This is not enough to kill that idiot."

"B-but a direct hit from that would-...!"

"Judge. This is an excellent lesson. Part of not being killed is having others who will not allow you to be killed."

A moment later, Shigenaga saw the light of Niwa's giant lightning ball.

...*Eh?*

It had burst, but not from a direct hit.

"It was destroyed...!?"

The mass of lightning pressure broke apart.

Scorching wind and sparks spread from there. And the torn electric power stretched out in lines.

Everything was dyed in white and two people stood at the center.

They had dove down from directly above.

They had shattered the lightning ball from above, collided with the ground, and yet easily stood up.

One was a half-dragon and the other was a dark green and red mobile shell.

"What, is lightning in vogue these days?" asked the half-dragon. "That makes things easier. I can stick with the same equipment and fighting style."

"That's right," agreed the mobile shell with a female voice.

She looked around the motionless battlefield, looked to Sviet Rus's Shigenaga fleet, and opened her mouth.

"I am Sendai Date Academy Vice Chancellor Date Narumi. ...On my

Chancellor's orders, I have met up with Musashi and have come here to fulfill the Chancellor's promise in her place."

Listen.

"Oushuu's promise is still valid. ...We must not forget that."

Saitou saw Musashi's Chancellor turning toward him.

"Hey, old man. Let's go on up together. I don't really understand this battlefield too much, but you've got to keep going, right?"

"Testament. But this place-..."

"Hey, old man. Could you clear a bit of a path for us?"

"...Why?" asked Saitou. "Why are you supporting us so much?"

"Hm? Well, Seijun's got all her political and whatever other reason for it, but the most obvious driving force for me would be that you were trying to die. Also...Kagekatsu."

"What about Kagekatsu-sama?"

"He's trying to go apologize to the woman he hurt, right?" The idiot smiled. "I did the same thing. I'll go bow down with Kagekatsu. So, old man, it'll probably be a lot of work, but can you go on ahead and tell that Marfa person that Kagekatsu is coming? You probably only need to ring the doorbell."

I mean...

"That's really what this battlefield is for you all, right?"

"Do you really think I'll let you up?"

A voice spoke from the base of the path leading up the hill.

It was Maeda Toshiie. He dropped a few silver coins from his coin roll sword as he faced his enemy. Also...

"Look at the situation. ...You're in trouble, don't you think?"

His enemy was the Sviet Rus strike force, Musashi's Chancellor and three

Special Duty Officers, and Date's Vice Chancellor.

As for Date's Vice Chancellor and Musashi's 2nd Special Duty Officer...

"Niwa, take care of them."

"Of them," repeated Matsu.

"I'd really prefer you asked if I could," sighed Niwa.

"Calm down," said Toshiie with a smile. "We'll be working hard too."

With that, a color grew from the ground.

It was the color white. White skeletons grew from the middle of the hill, the base of the hill, and the top of the hill. More than just along the path, they grew from the grassy slope as well.

The ghost bones stood from the hill like a dense crowd of withered trees. And...

"Here they come."

Some people slowly descended the hill path which had relatively few skeletons.

It was a group of combined corpse warriors.

"Novgorod will not take Uesugi's side, at least not until Nanao Castle is retaken. ...This will take more than ringing the doorbell, Musashi Chancellor."

"Doesn't that just mean she's one hell of a tsundere?" asked the Musashi Chancellor with a smile on his face. "A lot happened in the past and she really wants to be with him, but she just can't accept the things she can't accept. So she won't let those things go unaddressed. Isn't that all this is? She's just refusing to run from it all."

Then he looked up at the combined corpse warriors descending the hill.

"Similarly, you all can't accept this either. Just like me. You're going to fight so that result can carry all of your resentment away. You want to go all out and hit us with all of your resentment so you can let it go afterwards."

And...

“I guess that would be your regrets about Oushuu’s dawn. ...It’d be bad to let that go unaddressed, wouldn’t it?”

“Oh...?”

As the mist made even the night hazy, a long-lived elder woman exhaled on a deck sinking into that white current.

A sign frame was open by her hands. That Musashi divine transmission was sent via IZUMO and it carried the voice of Musashi’s Chancellor to her.

“Let’s do this right,” he said. “That’ll help things afterwards too.”

“Honestly, this is what we get after all that trouble and that forced thanks last night?”

She sent out a few divine mails bearing the seal of Fujiwara Yasuhira.

“The war Musashi seeks is about sending out everything you have and receiving that with everything you have... It is a conflict of the present that erases or clears up all lingering sorrow.”

“Now,” said Toori.

While on the battlefield and surrounded by enemies, he turned to Urquiaga and Narumi first.

“Uqui, is that tough-looking girl your girlfriend?”

“She is not my girlfriend. ...She is my wife.”

“Eh?” said Narumi as she turned his way, but Toori whistled and nodded.

“Girl, Uqui’s Catholic, so he won’t cheat on you or divorce you. But could you allow him porn games at least?”

“As long as he does not compare me to them and as long as he has time for me, I don’t really mind.”

“Then we have an excellent understanding,” said Urquiaga. “How about that, Tenzou? Your wife lacks the knowledge needed for you to even have a

misunderstanding about such things, so you have no chance of complete the routes to satisfaction."

"Heh. I have learned how to play through each route with great care."

"I see."

The three boys formed a triangle by using both hands to shake each other's hands and they brought their foreheads together.

"We might get our hands on the games early, but we always complete them at the same time!"

"If we completed it early, we might spoil it for each other after all."

"Yeah," agreed Toori as he let go.

And...

"Uqui, I'm leaving this to you. Now, Nate and Tenzou?"

"Judge, are we moving on ahead?" asked Mitotsudaira.

When Toori said "yeah", she did just that.

"My king?"

"Hm?"

"Only I am allowed to stand at the front of your path on this sort of battlefield."

"Judge. I need you protecting me from there."

"Judge," agreed Mitotsudaira as she lifted her nose a little and laughed quietly. "It is finally time."

It is finally time, repeated Mitotsudaira in her heart.

It was finally time to walk ahead of her king on the battlefield. She could move out ahead, turn back and ask him if this was the right way, and hear him say that it was.

She could walk down the path she thought was right and she had someone to support her when she looked back.

She had hoped for this sort of situation ever since middle school. But at Mikawa, they had been looking in the same direction, but it was hard to say she had moved out ahead. On the way to Mito, she had been taught again and again how lacking she was.

...But all of that will fade away in the happiness to come.

She had the silver chain suppliers for her summer uniform. They only had an ejection device, so pulling them back was a little slow. But that changed nothing if she continued using what was out without pulling it back in.

As soon as she raised two chains with both arms, the enemy began to move. So...

“Here I go, my king.”

Mitotsudaira walked out ahead of her king.

“I will clear a path as your knight. And to support you...”

Mitotsudaira looked up.

“You have heard that sound for a while now, haven’t you?”

“Sound?”

“Judge. The ringing of a fulfilled promise.”

Once she said that, the bone warriors and large skeletons in front of them were beaten down with a deafening noise.

Several massive objects had descended on them.

Within the ether light fragments of the white destruction, six figures rose from their landing stance. They were gods of war wearing dark gray armor. All six resembled dragons.

“The Date clan’s gods of war have arrived to assist us!”

Chapter 83: Tested One in a Removed Place

第八十三章

『離れ場の試練者』



早速だけども
上機嫌の
理由は何なのかしら
配点（支持）

It might be sudden

But why are you

In such a good mood?

Point Allocation (Support)

Narumi had already begun her battle with Niwa along the lower half of the hill and she heard the sound of the reinforcements descending from the sky.

It was a Date god of war unit. After shifting backup personnel in, a third of the main force's 18 gods of war had arrived.

...That's a lot for a foreign campaign.

This fight would not protect Date or help them in any way. They had sent a third of their main force to protect Sviet Rus.

This was a group of six taken from the people who had not been hit by Onikiri the day before, who had not been sent to fight the Seiryu, or who could still move after being injured. The Date clan would be unable to fight a god of war battle now. But...

"Vice Chancellor!"

One of those who began fighting called out to Narumi. It was a girl who had been in the mobile shell unit until Narumi had recommended her to Oniniwa.

"The Chancellor said they would be fine and told us to go here!"

"...Masamune did?"

"Judge!" she replied. "And with the Vice President's approval, you are authorized to transfer to Musashi. Your elopement is now official. ... Congratulations."

"I'm not sure what about that is worth congratulating."

After Narumi commented with a bitter smile, the half-dragon laughed while smashing one of Niwa's lightning attacks.

"Yes, when everything is a source of joy, it's hard to know what exactly to

celebrate.”

“Perhaps so,” said Narumi. “Then...”

This would be her last time fighting as part of the Date clan. She would have to say goodbye to her comrades and those who shared the Date name on the battlefield. So...

“Could you tell Masamune that Date Narumi remained unturning even as she left her clan?”

With those words, Narumi moved forward.

She raced forward as if to meet the barrage of lightning coming from Niwa.

Niwa realized her enemy was powerful.

It went beyond the title of Vice Chancellor. One thing in particular stood out about this girl wearing the mobile shell named Unturning Centipede.

...She has a lot of energy!

Niwa specialized in sound and movement, so she could tell. This opponent’s movements were excessive, but even the forced actions were kept under control.

An enemy was dangerous at times like this. They would rise not just one step but two or three steps above what she expected of them. And...

“Lightning Sky!”

When she raised her voice and swung her arm, a row of blue lightning strikes appeared in front of Narumi. If the girl continued forward, she would be hit by the 5 bolts in a row.

So Niwa assumed she would circle to the left or right. But...

“Hit her some more!!”

She added three additional strikes straight ahead.

But Unturning Centipede continued straight and slipped below the 8 lightning attacks.

The Centipede showed no fear of the descending lightning as she raised her butt, lowered her chin, and raced forward as if crawling. And as the 8 blue lights descended overhead...

“...!”

The Centipede drew mandible swords in the air and smashed each of the lightning bolts. The triple-segmented mandible swords were raised into the sky, the 8 electric strikes hit them like they were lightning rods, and sparks flew.

And the Centipede continued directly below the 8 blossoms of light.

Niwa stepped back as she realized the girl would reach her.

Then Niwa sensed the concept of wings from her enemy.

...What is this?

They were on the left and right. As the Centipede charged in low to the ground, something was launched from either side like spreading wings.

They were mandible swords.

And the Centipede's separated arms swung at chest height to capture Niwa in between.

It only looked like 2, but the number quickly grew to 8 and then more than 100 in an instant. When Date had accepted the Far Eastern diplomatic ship, Date Narumi had expanded her prosthetics like this on the Kawai Castle. And she used those arms for...

“Paths of Countless Hundreds...!”

The swords had five segments for their greatest reach, but Date's Vice Chancellor launched it all toward Niwa. So...

“Azure Blast!!”

With lightning stored in her fists, Niwa spread her hands and released that lightning to the left and right. And she did so toward the ground rather than the 100 pairs of prosthetic arms and blades.

The high power lightning attacks reflected off the ground and sprang up into the sky. The noise and power struck the arriving blades and swallowed them up.

“———!”

The Raiju appeared on Niwa's right shoulder. It raised its tail and roared as if to protect its master. A moment later, further power was released and light exploded to her left and right.

The strengthened lightning attacks blew away the arriving 100 pairs of mandible swords.

The 200 blades flew through the air while scattering electricity, but...

...I'm not done yet!

Niwa did not overlook her opponent. After all...

...That can't have been her real attack!

Niwa saw it as she used her dance to fall back.

A further pair of swords split the darkness and arrived from beyond the 100 pairs scattered to the left and right.

Niwa saw her enemy's attack.

After the 100 pairs of attacks on the left and right, a further two swords arrived.

How great was this girl's focus on combat?

When the left and right mandible swords entered Niwa's vision, she noticed charms on them. Multiple Catholic anti-spirit spells had been applied. The standard ones would not work on Niwa due to the difference in rank, but...

...Those are inquisitor spells!!

Historically, Mlasi was the sworn enemy of Catholicism. If these anti-spirit spells were Catholic...

“Tah...!”

Niwa's lightning attacks had no effect, so she activated the spell charms wrapped around her fists.

She used the ether of the Raiju residing inside her to activate the emblems for

defensive wind spells. A short strike was released to either side and they accurately struck the horizontally swung mandible swords from below.

Her timing had been flawless, so the twin mandible swords were knocked upwards, and...

“There...!”

Below sparks from the blades colliding overhead, Niwa swung her right knee up toward the Centipede who approached from directly ahead.

The Centipede had drawn blades in both her arms.

She intended to catch Niwa on either side from below and bisect her.

So Niwa raised her knee and turned her heel toward the approaching Centipede’s face.

“This is what you’re really after, isn’t it!?”

Niwa did not step on the Centipede.

As the previous two mandible swords collided noisily overhead, she grabbed their hilts and crossed them overhead.

A moment later, something collided with the crossed blades from above and ahead.

It was not a sword strike. It was a lightning strike. In fact, it was the very ones she herself had used.

The 8 azure lightning blasts she had launched at the very beginning had struck these blades all at once.

She did not even need to check what had happened.

...It was the mandible swords the Centipede first used to block my Lightning Sky!

Narumi had not abandoned the blades after they blocked the 8 attacks. She had let the lightning reside in the blades as they flew overhead and she had grabbed the swords with newly ejected arms. Lastly, she had thrown those toward Niwa while...

“You gathered the electricity filling those 100 pairs of swords, didn’t you!?”

The lightning scattering from each and every one had been guided into the 8 lightning swords. Then 8 false arms had made 8 slashes. The arms had shattered after grabbing the 8 attacks in midair, but the 8 blasts of lightning had still been directed downwards.

Niwa's own lightning should not have been able to harm her, but its lightning element prevented her from defending with lightning and she had no means of resisting the blades themselves.

These blades included anti-spirit spells, so what would happen if she could not resist their approach? She would be unable to defend herself with spells like before and the blades would simply stab into her.

That was her enemy's aim.

So she defended. She gathered strength in her arms and caught the descending 8 swords on the crossed blades overhead.

"...!"

The weight and momentum arrived in an instant.

If she could endure this, she could win, but it was a heavy blow. More than a simple strike, they had been launched with a pushing motion.

Niwa realized that Date Narumi was as skilled a warrior as her historical counterpart.

"Kh...!"

She could not endure it, so Niwa made a certain decision.

She twisted her shoulder joints and dislocated them herself.

There was a dull sound, but when her solid resistance suddenly vanished, the 8 lightning strikes lost control.

The direction of their power crumbled, so some veered away and other collided with each other.

"Scatter!"

They did just that.

The power of the 8 lightning blades exploded above the crossed blades.

They shattered.

Niwa's arms were spread by the force, but there was nothing she could do about it with her shoulders dislocated.

However, she saw her enemy in front of her.

She moved before Unturning Centipede could draw mandible swords on the left and right.

So she stepped on the Centipede. Her heel stomped on the metal head.

And she used the returning force to leap backwards and perform a backflip before falling back down. The Centipede's mandibles pierced the ground, and...

“———!”

Starting from the upper body, it rolled below Niwa.

...What is that?

Mitotsudaira saw a shift in the battle out of the corner of her eye.

It was Date Narumi. Mitotsudaira sometimes heard about that Date Vice Chancellor in the Mito territory.

Unturning Centipede, the mobile shell the girl wore, had just been stomped to the ground by Niwa of P.A. Oda.

But...

“That centipede really is unturning...!”

Mitotsudaira saw two forms in front of Niwa.

One was Unturning Centipede after receiving the attack from Niwa.

The mobile shell had been forced to a stop when it was stabbed deep into the ground, but it was still facing forward.

And something else stood behind Unturning Centipede. It was...

“Date Narumi!”

Narumi was there.

Just before Niwa's heel had hit, she had purged the head and torso along with the prosthetic arms as a decoy.

She was unharmed.

Niwa saw it as she backflipped and prepared to land.

Date Narumi stood beyond the crushed Unturning Centipede.

The girl stood up.

She had no arms and her upper body only wore a torn red dress. The color of her clothing resembled blood and everything below her navel was covered by the bottom half of Unturning Centipede.

It was obvious what had happened.

...She removed Unturning Centipede!

She had let the head, torso, and arms continue toward Niwa to be stomped on.

The method had been far from simple.

The mandible sword attack had drawn Niwa's attention upwards and then Narumi had redirected her attention toward the attack from below.

"And after preventing me from focusing straight ahead..."

A path had formed behind Narumi.

Unturning Centipede's legs were lined up to form the path. This expansion spell was known as Countless Hundreds of Paths. She had used it for acceleration aboard the Kawai Castle, but this was different.

The legs were driven into the ground like stakes.

...And she used that to rapidly stop herself!

She had stayed low to the ground with her butt raised to hide Countless Hundreds of Paths while opening the front of Unturning Centipede to allow herself to escape.

Then she released the connection between the legs and armored shell to slam

on the brakes while the top half of Unturning Centipede flew forward.

And Niwa had stomped on that, assuming it was Narumi herself.

Niwa was preparing to land from her backflip, so her body was fully extended.

And Narumi now had two arms in front of her. The prosthetic arms had been ejected from midair along with Unturning Centipede's arms and they had already drawn mandible swords.

"Masamune. This is for you."

The swift pair of attacks took the form of slashes from the left and right.

"Niwa-sama!"

On the Jurakudai's deck, Komahime cried out while watching the progress of the battle.

She was from Mogami. With Oushuu's promise in mind, she should have been rejoicing Niwa's defeat. Not to mention why she and Hidetsugu had become ghosts.

But...

...Niwa-sama treated Hidetsugu-sama really well!

And as she raised her voice, a light appeared on Novgorod's grassy field.

It was a blue light. That was the color of ether light, but the way it appeared and spread was different.

"Lightning!?"

It exploded. Wind blew, noise burst, and the pressure reached the Jurakudai.

And a single figure stood on the windswept field.

"Niwa-sama...!"

Narumi saw her enemy.

Niwa Nagahide was the #2 of P.A. Oda's Five Great Peaks and Six Heavenly

Demon Armies.

According to the Testament descriptions, she was a commander of the previous generation. And yet Narumi was able to face her here.

“Should I consider myself fortunate?”

Niwa turned toward those words.

“I suppose that would make me old-fashioned.”

Then Niwa looked down at her own body.

Her right arm was deeply split from the armpit to the collarbone. It was swaying like it was about to fall off, but it was not bleeding much and it was not torn off. Her left hip had also been badly torn into, but the same applied there.

Ether light surrounded the wounds. The light formed threads which seemed to sew the wounds shut.

“Is that your Mouse’s power?”

“It is the power of nature.”

They were likely plants. What looked like ivy or vines bound the wounds together and Niwa smiled. She bent her nearly torn-off arm and lightly threw her fist into midair.

She opened a few *insha kotob* and spoke.

“This body is something like a container for my capacity. Do you know how Niwa Nagahide died?”

Niwa gave the answer.

“According to the Testament descriptions, Nagahide suffered from a deadly stomach disease. He felt humiliated when Hashiba walked the path toward ruling the Far East, surpassed him, and began treating him coldly, so he disemboweled himself and sent the afflicted organ to Hashiba.”

“That sounds difficult to recreate.”

“It only requires a clear understanding.” Niwa smiled. “I adore knowing my own capacity and that I am no more than that capacity. ...Date Narumi, I had thought you were a lot like me.”

“Well...”

Narumi knew what Niwa meant. In her search for strength, she had replaced a portion of her body. And that seemed to be why Niwa smiled and continued.

“Aren’t things so much easier now that you have left the Date clan? ...After all, you can now swap out your capacity. Doesn’t that idea make things easier? Your obligation to Date is gone. Isn’t it so much easier being freed from looking after Masamune?” she asked. “After all, you had all four limbs replaced with prosthetics. Are the rumors true? When you were young, did you have your limbs devoured by the Seiryu when Masamune summoned it by mistake? Aren’t you happier having left a place like that?”

...She is trying to shake her!

Tenzou thought to himself as he followed Mitotsudaira and Toori while defending their backs.

Niwa used dance and music, so...

...She uses the theatre and the stage!

And she was using that to “shake” Narumi.

Niwa was talking about something entirely unrelated to battle. It was meant to disturb Narumi’s focus and create a slight opening.

The words were meaningless, but they would stab into the girl. And if they shook her heart...

“She is in trouble!!”

And Narumi opened her mouth to speak.

“My capacity?”

Her words continued slowly.

“That sounds so silly to me. ...You said I could swap out my capacity, didn’t you?”

Narumi held her hands out into the air and grabbed mandible swords from the emptiness.

“I have one thing to say to that.”

Which was...

“My capacity has yet to be filled.”

So...

“This is not easy for me and I do not feel lighter. By going somewhere other than Date, I will learn to truly think about Date and I will gain further obligations to fill that capacity.”

Narumi thought about what the half-dragon had once said.

...That makes it a land of mere decoration, huh?

If she was to believe those words...

“The outside may have been decorated, but my inner capacity was empty.”

So now that even those decorations had been shattered, what did she have left?

“As Date Narumi, I will simply continue forward without fearing to expose my capacity and my body.”

And with that, she started forward. She swung the two swords with a snap of her wrists, she stepped forward, and she ran.

She saw Niwa put up her defenses, but...

“I’m jealous.”

Niwa smiled a little and light surrounded her body.

She was turning to ether by allowing a Great Spirit inside her. The tree spirit was “entering” her body, but...

...My swords have anti-spirit divine protections!

Narumi had adequate speed and force behind the blows.

But then she saw the right half of Niwa's body being blown away.

The destruction had come from...

"An ether cannon!?"

The blast from the Jurakudai in the southern sky pierced through Niwa and flew right for Narumi.

Komahime took a rough breath on the Jurakudai's deck.

She had only made the command. She had only given the instruction, and yet...

...Oh, honestly!

She had to wonder how needlessly kind she was as ether tears fell to the deck.

This was her first time ordering an attack.

And it was to protect the P.A. Oda commander who had given the command leading to her own suicide just a few weeks prior.

How needlessly kind could she be? She had killed herself to avoid causing her mother any trouble, but she had been easily swayed by the kindness she found within the enemy ranks. However...

"Acting Captain! Are you okay!?"

The girl and boy students on the deck had only spent about two weeks with her.

That short time was nothing compared to her time in Mogami.

And yet they were worried for her now.

They were concerned for her and for Hidetsugu who was still motionlessly asleep. One girl even ran over with a normal blanket, forgetting it would pass right through her ghostly body.

The way they all treated her told her one thing.

...They don't want to lose me.

“Are you okay, Acting Captain!?”

I am. I am okay. But...

“I just hadn’t settled in quite yet.”

Komahime raised her head. She wiped away her tears and reached for the offered blanket, but her hand passed through it as expected. The girl who had brought it cried out in surprise and then laughed toward the deck.

...Yes.

I’ve parted ways with Mogami, Komahime belatedly told herself. That greeting was the end, so I’m part of P.A. Oda now.

Is that why? Or had it been like this already and that was unrelated?

Everyone treats me like the Jurakudai’s captain and they look after me.

My capacity has been filled with the waters of P.A. Oda.

I can thank Niwa’s support for this. They didn’t tie me down and instead let me do and say what I wanted.

And...

“Niwa-sama!”

Niwa stood on the battlefield hill. The destroyed half of her ether body was slowly recovering. And the unharmed arm on the other side was raised toward Komahime.

The ether cannon had torn up the ground in front of her.

Date Narumi would have been there.

Narumi was not a stranger to Komahime. In fact, she knew her quite well. Narumi had attended all the meetings with the Date clan and Komahime had often confided in her as an older girl she could speak with about Kojirou. They had even sent each other gifts on their birthdays or for season’s greetings.

That was all outside of Komahime’s current capacity.

What mattered to her now and what covered for and took good care of her now were her allies and her camp. Even if this girl was an old acquaintance, if

she would damage that camp...

“You are my enemy!!”

That shout was directed toward Date Narumi.

She was unharmed.

Before Komahime could wonder why, she saw someone standing in front of the girl.

It was a half-dragon. He held out a giant half-destroyed anti-ship sword.

“Musashi’s 2nd Special Duty Officer...!”

Niwa saw the half-dragon fly in front of her and destroy the ether cannon.

Her timing had been perfect. Before resuming the fight, she had given a few recovery instructions through an *insha kotob* while speaking to Komahime. From there, she only had to shake Narumi with her words to buy enough time for the cannon to aim and then let Narumi move forward.

With the ether cannon fired as a counterattack, Narumi should not have been able to dodge it. But instead...

...I never thought the ether cannon blast itself would be broken.

Not even a half-dragon had the strength to pull that off. Someone would have to have told him where to aim and with what timing. So...

“Was it you?”

An old man stood surrounded by demons in a distant part of the grass.

It was Saitou. He looked her way and raised his eyebrows.

“Know that my Zhong Kui power can be used for more than attack.”

“I will make sure to remember that. And...”

Niwa leaped backwards. Narumi stood up and the half-dragon raised his guard, but...

“It’s too bad, but my performance time has run out. After all...the next stage is beginning.”

Niwa said that just as something landed on the bottom of the hill.

The sky moved and the ground advanced.

P.A. Oda had begun a new action.

Narumi saw two movements: one in the sky and one on the ground.

In the northwestern sky, Sakuma's fleet created an attack formation that included the reserve ships.

And from the bottom to the midpoint of the southern hill, giant forms advanced toward the eastern battlefield.

It was a row of gods of war, but...

"What are those...?"

Narumi frowned and Niwa answered her while smiling bitterly and continuing to fall back.

"Those are Mori Nagayoshi's Boneless Men!"

Chapter 84: Arriving Pursuer

第八十四章

『到着の追撃者』



吠えろ
それでもまだ
挨拶にもならん
配点（こんばんは一）

Roar

But even that

Is not a greeting

Point Allocation (Good Evening)

Mitotsudaira saw movement as she cleared a path toward the hill.

It was Maeda Toshiie. He turned toward the P.A. Oda gods of war arriving from the south.

“Okay, this is all yours, Mori!”

“Oh, hey! Are you trying to flee!?”

“It’s called a strategic withdrawal! Oh, whoops. I need to make it convincing, don’t I!? ...Wh-what!? I have to make a temporary withdrawal *now* of all times!?”

“*Now* of all times!?” echoed Matsu.

Mitotsudaira found it odd that Toshiie inexplicably made a show of jumping into the air before leaving, but she still observed their surroundings from the lead.

Currently, skeleton and combined corpse warriors covered mostly the middle section of the hill, but...

“Nate. ...The path we need to take looks pretty wide open.”

The presence of Date’s gods of war meant a lot.

They were especially effective against the large skeletons created by combining the small ones and the large apes.

Date’s dragon knights corresponded to the mounted riflemen in the Testament descriptions.

They would use their guns at long range, their spears at mid range, and their swords at close range.

Meanwhile, something arrived from the southern field Toshiie had

disappeared into.

It was the P.A. Oda gods of war that Narumi and the others had seen. There were 17 in all. That looked like a lot, but Date's god of war unit was well trained. And in Mitotsudaira's opinion...

...The P.A. Oda gods of war are moving weirdly.

They seemed to be dragging their feet somewhat and walking with their hips. And as soon as she arrived at the path up the hill, the enemy gods of war arrived within range of Date's rifles.

It was a distance of about 200 meters.

With spell homing, a hit was guaranteed at that distance. Even if the enemy used defense spells...

...That's close enough to shoot through them, isn't it?

As soon as she thought that, Date formed a firing line and opened fire.

Date's god of war unit attacked in groups of three. Three gods of war took turns firing on and defeating the leftmost and rightmost of the enemy's 17 gods of war.

Spell gunpowder constantly burst from the firing line and the gunfire echoed across the hill and into the sky.

They ignored the large skeletons that rose up at mid range.

"Everyone, focus on the enemy god of war unit!"

While their commander barked instructions, the enemy gods of war on the far left and right were destroyed. The armor split, the upper bodies bent back, they took a step back, and...

"———"

They collapsed. Meanwhile, another enemy and, a breath later, yet another were destroyed.

"Ohh!" cheered the demon assault unit following the Musashi group and trying to get behind cover. They were also worried about Sakuma's fleet

approaching the northern Sviet Rus fleet in the western sky. “Looks like we can leave this to Date!!”

While they said that, the P.A. Oda gods of war were struck and shattered by the flying bullets. The roar of gunfire reverberated through the air and spell gunpowder charms scattered as ether light. The sound and light shook the ground like an earthquake and even the demons covered their auditory organs with their hands. But suddenly...

“Huh...? What’s up with the number of enemy gods of war?”

The others looked 200 meters ahead as well and counted the number of gods of war, including those that had collapsed from the gunfire.

“11...?”

“That’s odd,” someone said. “Wasn’t it 17?”

But for some reason...

“6 of them disappeared!?”

Before they even finished the question, the Date gods of war suddenly moved.

They fell back. And it was a forced retreat using the wings on their back.

The wind shattered as the giant forms moved. Flying at ground level created something much like an explosion of air.

“Fall back...!”

Four of the gods of war were safe, but the other two were pounded into the ground by massive falling objects.

The Date gods of war had their armor broken and were knocked to the ground by what descended from above.

“The 6 P.A. Oda gods of war!?”

“Impossible,” shouted one of the demons. “Even Date’s gods of war use their flight devices when they make a jump! So what was that!? How far did those Oda ones jump!?”

It had been a distance of 200 meters. And...

“They did it without flight devices!?”

However, they could not continue asking their questions. Even if there was a trick to it, the facts remained the same.

So they raised their guard. Their sharp gaze watched as the enemies stood up. Two of them seemed to crawl along the gods of war they had crushed and the four that had been dodged pulled themselves up from the ground after half embedding themselves in it.

The P.A. Oda gods of war stood up with loose and wriggling movements.

Then the Date gods of war made a charge. They were targeting the two enemies that had struck their own. If they were to protect their comrades, they needed to eliminate the enemy gods of war on top of them.

They charged with their spears held at their waists and they thrust them straight forward, but...

“What is with these things!?”

Two of the four were blown away.

They had been struck.

The P.A. Oda gods of war did not seem to mind having spears stabbed half of their length into their stomachs or chests and they knocked the Date gods of war away with a backhand punch.

That technique of great and impressive strength was a simple one.

The P.A. Oda gods of war had thick limbs, and...

“What was that sensation and that way they bent...?”

The untouched commander and second-in-command raised their guard, as did another that had recovered after being knocked away.

They saw the six gods of war stand up with two words imprinted on their bodies: Boneless Men.

That was the name of these gods of war.

“It can’t be...”

The Date commander spoke the identity of this oddity they were up against.

It explained the ability to leap more than 200 meters, to keep moving even after taking a spear, and to send a heavy god of war flying in a single blow.

“Do they have no skeletal frame...? Are they primarily made of artificial muscle!?”

“That’s it all right. Although it can be pretty dangerous cause they’re a bit hard to control.”

On the flagship at the rear of Sakuma’s fleet, Sakuma smiled while operating a command *insha kotob*.

“Mori, how about it? How are things fighting in a major position?”

Mory: “Oh! Yes! The inside of the god of war is so pleasant that I just about give into my desires if I let my guard down! But I can restrain myself!”

Mori Nagayoshi was a tentacle creature. His entire body was mostly muscle fiber, so after taking him in, Hashiba had suggested they might see something amazing if they put him in a mobile shell or god of war.

...Although it took a lot of work to actually reach the idea of making a frameless god of war.

On Toshiie’s suggestion, they had started by having him wear a cheap mobile shell, but the cylinder of armor had seemed meaningless when moving at high speed and jumping around. It had also created a dangerous visual, so they had rejected it. Especially bad was the inner suit developed for Mori to make sure he was not harmed by the mobile shell itself. When Narimasa had seen it...

“What’s this giant rubber product? Oh, it’s Mori’s? It suits you.”

That unnecessary comment had hurt Mori’s heart, so they had given up on the idea.

They had ultimately placed him in a god of war designed for him, but...

“Are you still not used to piloting it? Or am I wrong?”

Mory: “I can move the one around just fine! So don’t worry! I have right turns, left turns, and curving upwards down pat!”

“That sounds worrying in a number of ways, but whatever. I’m sure it’s fine. ... But just the one?”

“That’s right,” said Mori.

Mory: “My mind can’t directly reach the separated ones, so my control is less certain.”

“So you have a ton of tentacles, but you don’t use most of them as primary tentacles very often? Or do I have that wrong?”

Mory: “That’s right. ...Back when I was captured by that Dark Continent evil god cult, they had me drugged which simplified my actions, so I could move all of them. But right now, I can only move about 12 of them to their full capacity. I need to work harder at training. ...Oh, but I’ll do my very best in this battle! That will help Lady Hashiba too!!”

“I see,” said Sakuma as her ears picked up the sounds of Mori’s battle from beyond the cannon fire.

Mori mostly fought using the limbs. His great strength turned them into thick whips which delivered blows powerful enough to move a Dragon-class transport ship.

...But his greatest advantage is his defensive strength.

With no frame, the muscle fibers were merely bundled up at the important points that corresponded to joints. The lubrication system and everything else was unified without being bound to a skeletal frame, so it all came down to his sturdiness and ability to regenerate.

He could regenerate from a simple blade attack and blunt impacts were absorbed by the flexibility of the muscle fibers. They would bend like rubber and none of the force would get through to him. And then...

Mory: “Reaction Punch...!”

He sent the reaction to the blow right back toward his enemy.

He was nothing but trouble for anyone fighting him.

The enemy would feel like they had run across a strange monster. And this monster was well trained in combat against gods of war.

“He can control several at once with the shared memory, huh? Hashiba’s eye for talent is as unbelievable as ever.”

Mori fought.

...I need to do my best!!

It was night and he was inside a god of war.

Even so, that qualified as “outside” for him.

It was a stark contrast to a few years before. Back when even his memories were unclear, he had been trapped for a long, long time in a dark, damp, stuffy place that was occasionally filled with smoke.

There had been people there, but they had not been there for him to speak with and he had been in no state to do so regardless. His time there had been nothing more than flesh, warmth, wriggling, and exchanging dampness, but...

...At some point, I saw light.

His memories of that time were unclear. The dampness had remained and he had been exhausted, but he had seen light in the darkness.

It had been the light of the outside.

It had been his first time seeing light and it had been a bright white, but once his sensory organs had grown accustomed to it, it had gained the color blue.

It had been the sky.

Just remembering that moment caused his heart to tremble. He began to harden. He had not even known where he was before that, he had barely known any language, and he had never thought about how he was living his life, but...

“Are you...awake...?”

He had thought he heard a voice from the sky.

That blue sky had surrounded him endlessly in every direction and he had realized the voice came from a ship floating high in that sky, but the voice had clearly spoken to him.

“This all belongs to you. ...I will return what was stolen from you.”

He had not known what that meant, but...

...Yes.

If someone had asked him if he had hated that endless wriggling in the darkness with no conception of time, he was not actually sure what his answer would have been. He had not had trouble living from day to day and, even if he had been forced into doing it, he felt that had been a decent life for his species.

But he had also had another thought: *There's no one to talk to me in that darkness.*

No one there had taught him he could go anywhere and return to anywhere as a member of this world.

...I could always return to that darkness, but...

After recovering and being told he could go back if he wanted to, he had made up his mind.

“I-I will be useful! I-I’m sure I’ll be useful!! Lady Hashiba! Please let me join you!”

“...U-um, do you have any special skills?”

“Y-yes! My head spins at the moment of impact!”

“That sounds like fun, so you’re hired!” Shibata had decided. “And when it’s my decision, the others can’t complain!”

“Ehhh!?”

The others had been shocked, but Hashiba had raised her hand.

“Someone whose head spins at the moment of impact fills a gap in our personnel, so, um, how about we accept him?”

He had been accepted because no one else could do that.

I'm glad, thought Mori. He would sometimes look to the sky since then. He loved the sky during the day, during the evening, and at night. When he could see so far into the distance, he felt like he was being cleansed.

He did not know if he would eventually be able to fall in love, get married, and raise a family like normal, but he did want to be happy and show Hashiba and the others that he was happy. And then he would say goodbye to his memories of the time he had spent in that dark and cramped place. So...

...I need to do my best...

With that simple comment in his heart, Mori moved his body to fight.

And he spoke into a communication spell while striking the Date gods of war.

“L-Lady Sakuma! I’m leaving the sky to you!”

As Sakuma’s fleet advanced in a defensive formation, Kagekatsu chose to protect Saitou’s landing fleet while also commanding the rest of their fleets to intercept.

He checked the formation of the fleets on a *sankt okno* and then adjusted their position at the flotilla level.

By stretching Naoe’s 1st fleet to the west and Shigenaga’s 4th fleet to the east, he created one long line.

That was to present the smallest area for Sakuma’s fleet to hit, but...

“Niwa has done a lot of work down on the ground.”

That was the #2 of the Five Great Peaks and the Six Heavenly Demon Armies. She had been driven back by Date Narumi, but her lightning attacks had suppressed eastern Novgorod, including the sky.

She had held off even Kagekatsu’s fleet long enough for Toshiie and the combined corpse warriors to arrive.

Currently, Toshiie’s ghost warriors and Mori Nagayoshi’s gods of war were holding eastern Novgorod. Their numbers were small, but it was enough to keep anyone from climbing the hill. And...

“Chancellor, this is Honjou Shigenaga from the 4th fleet. ...An enemy formation is approaching from the south at low speed!”

That was Shibata’s fleet. He could not join in with the Battle of Nanao Castle still underway, but he was still a deterrent.

So Kagekatsu sent out his words.

“Landing from the east is not possible. ...We will stick with the original plan. Sviet Rus will continue the landing operation from northern Novgorod. And to that end...” He gave his commands. “All fleets, rapidly descend to 200 meters above Novgorod. From there, check your individual flotilla’s commands.”

Listen.

“With this battle, Sviet Rus will demonstrate a new promise that binds us and Oushuu to a new era.”

As the Sviet Rus fleets began to descend, Sakuma pushed them eastward.

They could not circle to the east or south of Novgorod because of the slow advance of Shibata’s fleet from the south, but Sviet Rus’s fleets could not flee to the north either. That would mean losing their landing position there and abandoning the landing unit and the Musashi group.

...So they’re fleeing downwards!? Is that it!?

When a defensive fleet attacked, their own defense barriers got in the way. Firing straight ahead was one thing, but the angle of fire for their cannons was restricted when firing up, down, left, or right. When the target itself moved up or down, it affected all of the ships’ ability to secure the proper angle of fire. But...

“Why are you leaving yourself undefended like that!? Well!?”

The top of a ship had the deck and weak points such as the bridge. Sviet Rus was exposing those areas because they planned on targeting the bottom of Sakuma’s fleet. Due to the virtual ocean, aerial ships generally did not place cannons on the bottom, so descending allowed one to avoid enemy fire while gaining a chance to fire back at them. But...

“How naïve!”

Sakuma raised her right arm.

“I’ll show you just what’s possible with defensive firing. Yes, I will! ...Prepare homing fire for a descending fleet!!”

Each of the ships in Sakuma’s fleet transformed. The gun batteries meant for firing to the side jutted outwards on both sides.

“Input enemy location...!!”

On Sakuma’s instructions, they all turned to point into the sky. And then...

“Fire!!”

The front 12 ships of Sakuma’s fleet produced the flash of firing.

But that light was not directed forward.

It was directed straight up.

All of the cannon fire flew over their own defense barriers and into the sky.

Tracer spell shells flew 800 meters above Sakuma’s fleet. There were Garudas stopped on the tips and they reacted once they arrived that high in the sky.

“...!”

They cried out and kicked at the spell shells. They kicked them downwards.

The rapidly descending bundles of light flew straight toward the Sviet Rus fleets.

And after a beat, they scored direct hits.

They had not gained much speed from the fall, so they used something other than their own destructive power.

“These are our newly developed shockwave shells! Be hit and be sunk! That would be perfect!!”

Sakuma watched as the descending Sviet Rus fleets produced barriers to defend their upper surfaces, but that was not enough.

The glowing shells did not just explode directly above. They also slipped between the gaps in the fleets and burst to the sides or from below.

“This is the ultimate defensive bombardment! This body blow reverberates in your gut!”

The multiple bombings hit the front third of the descending Sviet Rus fleets. It was a barrage.

The decks and hulls were hit. Some of the ships were knocked further down, some shook and tilted, and some collided with another ship above them.

And after the final blast passed through, Sakuma gave a shout.

“Prepare the second round!”

Kagekatsu’s 1st fleet shook in the shockwaves and was tossed by the rough wind.

Alarms rang and damage reports arrived from each flotilla. His own flagship was tilted from the impacts and continued to descend while correcting the tilt.

Fire rose from the back. One of the side power devices had been damaged.

But...

“Well done.”

He looked straight up at his enemy and spoke even as he expected a second round.

“All ships, ready your cannons straight ahead. As for above...”

He ignored the blaring alarms, faced his enemy, and gave his instructions.

“Listen. Do not use defense barriers. Use buffering spells.”

Sakuma saw Sviet Rus’s decision just before she ordered the second round.

...Buffering spells!?

Buffering spells altered the flow of air and pressure. While defense barriers

deflected attacks to a set surface, buffering spells protected and redirected the damage to the entire ship.

They were indeed a good choice to defend against shockwave shells. But...

“...?”

Sakuma sensed a change in the battlefield.

Something was different from before. The Sviet Rus fleets were descending and spewing smoke thanks to her attack, but...

“The Musashi!!”

The silhouette visible far behind the Sviet Rus fleets had vanished.

The Musashi had entered stealth cruising.

“Navigator! Where is the enemy!? Check the last movement of their wind pattern and predict their location!”

“I can’t! ...Those shockwave shells disturbed the air currents in front of the fleet too much! The Musashi’s reading has completely vanished!”

In that case, concluded Sakuma before raising her right hand.

“Prepare homing fire for a descending fleet! Input enemy location...!!”

She was no longer targeting the Sviet Rus fleets. She needed to fire on the enemy that would be passing above the descending Sviet Rus fleets and above her own fleet.

“Unlimited range directly above! Our target is the Musashi!!”

Sakuma’s fleet launched a massive amount of spell fire toward the heavens.

With a refreshing sound, the lines of light were released straight into the sky.

A moment later, color appeared in the sky.

It was white. That ether cloud or spray appeared when a stealth barrier was deactivated. A portion of the sky seemed to peel back to reveal...

“Is it the Musashi!?”

But the Musashi was not passing by above Sakuma's fleet.

The giant ship was standing vertically with its front end pointed straight down toward them.

"A side flip!?"

It was like the entire Musashi was glaring down at them from the sky. But...

"Open defense barriers above us!!"

The Musashi had not been built as a warship. When it had left the Ariake, its armaments had been lacking compared to the similar-sized Azuchi Castle. Thus, Sakuma concluded it could not provide a lethal blow from that position. It was after something else.

"By side flipping over us, it can trap us between itself and Sviet Rus! Rear fleet, open defense barriers and buffering spells behind you! After enduring the attack from above, start east!" shouted Sakuma. "When the Musashi drops back down on the west, use the wind it produces to travel east! We'll push through Sviet Rus and use their scattered fleet as a shield while circling to the south!"

As soon as she finished giving her orders, Sakuma felt a sudden chill.

Icy air seemed to be descending from the sky.

...Eh?

She did not have time to look up, but she sensed it from the top edge of her vision.

The Musashi had disappeared.

Having been carried back from Date by Urquiaga, Suzu was welcomed onto Musashino's bridge by "Musashino" and the others. She sat in the central seat and spoke despite being out of breath.

"Wh-what should I do!?"

Vice President: "Well, we're about to do a low-power test firing of the Musashi's main cannon."

“Judge,” she said while sensing the Musashi had entered stealth mode while tilted vertically.

Vice President: “Once the preparations are complete, we’ll make the final adjustments here and fire. We can’t fire it for real without Aoi here, so just think of it as a quick test firing. The Acting Captain has to fill in for Aoi.”

Then Masazumi sent her the command words in audio form.

So Suzu quickly spoke them while “Musashino” supported her shoulders.

“Musashi Main Cannon Kanesada – Short Barrel – Small Kanesada Mode...”

She said it.

“Fire...!”

It was not a physical impact.

It was an invisible mass that was thrust down from the heavens.

Sakuma’s fleet and the other fleets with it had a total of 71 ships. They were spread out over a distance of 5 kilometers and the 43 located northwest of Novgorod were destroyed.

They were all crushed at once by an impact from above, they creaked, and...

“...!”

The ships’ frames reacted to the pressure from above. Like a crushed ball popping back into shape, they hopped up from below.

With a metallic scream, several layers of armor tore from the bent frames.

The scattering armor collided, produced sparks, reverberated with noise, and yet...

“———”

Every last piece of the breaking ships were pushed back down by the wide-range power arriving from above.

The defense barriers were useless.

Like the sky itself had dropped down on them, the vertical layers of the

defensive fleet collided with the layer below them and then were crushed by the surface of pressure.

They were knocked down.

The attack covered a diameter of greater than 4 kilometers.

In the sky northwest of Novgorod, it hit the several rows approaching the Sviet Rus fleets and it hit the area around Sakuma's flagship in the very back. Save for the Jurakudai and a few other ships, all of the ships were knocked from the sky as if a colossal hammer had swung down on them.

And then the proof of the falling power appeared.

White fog dyed the wide-range attack from high in the sky. The pillar of fog looked like a white hammer and it slowly descended and finally reached the falling fleet.

In that instant, the hammer exploded.

From above to below, the sky burst while surrounded by a ring of exploding water vapor that was bent and distorted from within.

That violently shook the remaining ships and pulled the lighter ships into a vortex of air.

The alarms belatedly started sounding and warning lights flashed in the sky.

At the same time, fires and lights blossomed on the ground.

The fallen ships were exploding while the crews escaped. The red was fire and the bluish-white was ether light. Those two colors illuminated the night sky from below.

By that time, the remnants of Sakuma's fleet numbered only 11 including the Jurakudai.

And those that remained airborne saw something in the western night sky that had been cleared of the many ships cluttering it before.

It was the Musashi.

It twisted in its side flip and it returned its bottom hull to its horizontal position.

The bow faced east.

The remnants of Sakuma's fleet were trapped between it and Sviet Rus.

The Musashi shed the last fragments of its stealth barrier.

Various parts pulsed with ether power and it had already transformed from gravitational cruising mode to normal cruising mode.

With the virtual ocean around it, it slowly tilted forward.

The Musashi moved forward toward Sakuma's fleet. And as it moved directly forward, it briefly released a divine transmission to all of the Musashi and to the surrounding airspace.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the cities and of the surrounding space. Quasi-Bahamut-class Aerial City Ship Musashi will now signal 9 PM using Musashi Ariadust Academy's bell. We are currently arriving at Novgorod via Sviet Rus's southern corridor. In accordance with Sviet Rus's request, we will be engaging in commercial mercenary activity, so we ask for your cooperation. Over."

The bell rang. It rang nine times. Everything rang.

"Now, let us begin. Over."

The Musashi moved forward.

Chapter 85: Dropout in the Sky

第八十五章

『空の脱落者』



見送るまでもなく
去るでもなく
ただ落ちていく
配点 (高空)

You do not see it off

It does not leave

It simply falls

Point Allocation (High in the Sky)

Sakuma tried to understand the heat and cooling inside her.

An alarm blared and the ship shook intermittently below her. She desperately tried to determine what she understood and what she did not.

...What!? What in the world was that!?

She did not know what had happened, but she did know her fleet had taken a devastating blow and the Musashi was circling to the west.

The result was obvious, but how it had happened was unclear. She only knew...

Mory: “L-Lady Sakuma! Are you okay!?”

“Yes,” replied Sakuma. “I know, I know. I’m fine...and the battle is still underway!”

She changed how she felt about this. The Musashi had done something from above and it had taken out a large portion of her fleet.

But some of the ships had survived and they were continuing the fight. The surviving ships were waiting for word from their commander.

...So...

Most of the *insha kotobs* by her hand had lost their connection, but she had been right to sync with the other ships’ data in advance. Once she abandoned the links to the sunk ships, she could send out synchronized commands to all of the surviving ships.

She could fight, so she opened the command channel and spoke.

“All ships of my fleet, listen up!”

The front line facing Sviet Rus’s fleet had survived. The defense barrier

supplied by the Jurakudai was thickest there, so...

“All surviving ships, advance full speed to the east with defense barriers up!”

That would take them above Sviet Rus’s fleet. Sviet Rus’s fleet would fire on them from below, but it was better than having the Musashi attack them from behind. By flying above Sviet Rus’s fleet, they could prevent the Musashi from pursuing them.

The problem was that the Jurakudai was still on the western side of Novgorod. If they circled eastward to escape the Musashi, they would lose the Jurakudai’s defense support while passing over Sviet Rus’s fleet.

...Of course, that just means each ship will be relying on its own defense barrier like normal.

But the front line was already on its way toward the Sviet Rus fleet, so they did not have time to turn westward. Massive aerial ships were left open to attack when they turned, so it would be better to continue forward even if it meant taking some hits.

So Sakuma spoke while sending her own ship out to follow the front line which had prepared its defense barriers.

“Go...!”

As soon as she said that, two things happened simultaneously.

First, the front line began to move with defense barriers out front.

And second...

“...!?”

An intense sound of impact came from ahead of those front line ships.

A great mass had flown in from the eastern sky and collided with their thick defense barriers.

It was one of the Musashi’s transport ships.

Komahime saw it from the Jurakudai’s deck.

The front line of Sakuma's fleet had survived the Musashi's strange attack, but now one of Musashi's unique transport ships flew in from the east and collided with them.

However, that collision was meaningless. The surviving ships were protected by a defense barrier strengthened by the Jurakudai.

The Jurakudai had taken a fair amount of damage from the previous attack. The airspace was a mess and its support of the other ships' defense barriers was not perfect, but the defense barrier under the Jurakudai's protection still would not be destroyed by a mere transport ship collision.

...It can withstand this!

To prove that, the barrier trembled and dimmed but ultimately held.

And Komahime saw the transport ship break and crumple, starting from the bow.

The sounds of metal bending and the hull breaking arrived in an instant.

The transport ship had lost to the defense barrier.

The barrier had won.

The Jurakudai could not provide perfect support because most of its primary power had been used to endure the Musashi's attack and its aftermath, but once the distortion from the transport ship collision was corrected, ether fuel could be distributed from neighboring barriers to return it to normal.

But Komahime saw something else.

The transport ship had crumpled after colliding with the barrier, but someone stood on the very front edge of its deck.

It was a boy. He wore a work vest and he raised both fists toward the defense barrier in front of him.

She heard his voice.

"Three punches and I can destroy this barrier."

The defense barrier protecting Sakuma's front line shattered.

Shattering the barrier should not have been possible, but just as it bent while absorbing the impact of the transport ship, the boy punched it at a single point.

“...That’s three.”

The last blow of the rapid combination really did destroy the great shield of light.

It did not end at just the one. Because all of the barriers’ power sources and control systems were linked to receive support from the Jurakudai, the destruction of the one spread to them all. Not all of the barriers shattered, but...

“...!?”

A barrage from the east collided with all of the defense barriers at once.

The Sviet Rus fleet was firing on them.

After descending earlier, that fleet was ascending.

With a sound much like an ensemble of wind instruments, all of the barriers shattered at once.

That was the sound of Sakuma’s defense fleet losing the reason for that name.

It gradually dawned on Komahime that Sakuma’s fleet would be destroyed.

But not just because that defense fleet’s barriers had been destroyed.

She saw something in front of the Jurakudai and the other remaining ships.

...Sviet Rus’s fleet is forming a long line and facing us...

The Sviet Rus fleet had rapidly ascended after descending earlier.

That was not something they could do on short notice.

Their commander, Kagekatsu, must have received information on what kind of attack the Musashi would make. That was why they had lowered their altitude to use Sakuma’s fleet and defense barriers as a shield against the Musashi’s attack from above. And...

“They used buffering spells to stop the disturbed air currents and maintain a stable position...”

And all the while, Kagekatsu had prepared to ascend.

He refused to let Sakuma’s destabilized fleet escape.

And the Jurakudai could not move thanks to the feedback from the destruction of the defense barriers. The Jurakudai shook and power surged back into its power system, until...

“...!”

White armor flew through the air. The power system had burst into flames and exploded from the back of the Jurakudai.

And Komahime saw the Sviet Rus fleet begin to move.

“The Wheel Formation...!”

This was the formation used by Felipe Segundo at the beginning of the Armada Battle.

Sviet Rus’s Saitou and Naoe fleets moved forward. They tilted their forward movement to fly horizontally in front of Sakuma’s surviving ships.

“...!”

And shells flew toward those defenseless ships.

A single straight line existed within the scattering destruction.

It was the flagship of Sakuma’s fleet, Sakuma’s own Kraken-class ship.

It flew full speed toward the remnants of her fleet.

However, it was not joining those surviving ships. Sakuma had shifted its course to head southeast on its own. She was passing over Novgorod to join with Shibata’s fleet.

It looked a lot like she had abandoned the remnants of her fleet, but...

“Lady Sakuma...!”

The flagship rang with the divine transmissions from those surviving ships.

“It’s no use! We’ll draw their attention!”

“Allow me to show you a bit of what I can do!” she replied. “Got that!?”

Sakuma used her flagship to begin firing on the Sviet Rus fleet stretched out east to west in a Wheel Formation.

She had no defense barrier. She was completely defenseless, but she shouted over at her enemy.

“Is Sviet Rus’s ‘love’ really not going to respond in kind when Retreating Sakuma puts herself in danger!? Well!?”

“I will take that confession seriously!”

As Naoe shouted back, the wheel turned toward her, so Sakuma raised her voice.

“You have my thanks! ...Prepare for artillery battle!!”

An impressive number of shells – both physical and ether – shot through the night.

Sakuma had to let the enemy fire on her. If the shellfire was focused on her, the remnants of her fleet could escape. And to do that, she remained defenseless and made sure the enemy had her in their sights.

“Fire...!”

At the same time, her ship shook violently. The port side was facing Naoe’s fleet, so the armor there flew into the sky and the fragments tore at the air. But Sakuma saw the remnants of her fleet rapidly descending. They had chosen to retreat that way instead of turning around.

It was a good decision. She had not ordered them to do that, but the ships sunk by the Musashi’s attack were there. Descending would allow them to pick up those crews in addition to escaping.

I have some good men, thought Sakuma. By using her one ship as a shield, the crews of the sunk ships could be rescued instead of taken prisoner. So...

“There is no shame in the name Retreating Sakuma...! None at all!!”

Komahime viewed the scene while the Jurakudai retreated into the southwestern sky.

Sakuma's flagship was taking damage and tilting to the right as it slowly fell.

Komahime's knowledge of aerial ships told her that tilt was too much to recover from.

But that flagship had turned its bottom hull toward the Sviet Rus fleet and the crew could be seen jumping from the deck to escape.

Komahime did not know if Sakuma was among them, but...

"Ah..."

Flames burst from the below the flagship's deck. The explosive flames were surrounded in ether light and they shook the ship.

...It's falling...

The force of the explosion caused the flagship to sway toward Naoe's fleet, but it was never going to reach.

The flagship fell while still a long way away. All that remained in the night sky was the Sviet Rus fleet and...

"The Musashi...!"

Sakuma's flagship exploded and filled the night sky with red light.

That color and tremor reached the giant ship made of 8 smaller ships from below as it slowly joined the Sviet Rus fleet to the north. That meant Sviet Rus had more or less conquered the northern half of Novgorod, and...

"Musashi has joined with Sviet Rus and Oushuu...!"

This is bad, thought Fuwa.

The Musashi had just arrived at Novgorod.

That meant the Azuchi Castle, which could move at the same speed, should have been headed here as well. It was supposed to be loaded with supplies and personnel for Hashiba's invasion of Mouri, and it would be giving some of those

to the people here. Or it should have been.

But the wide-range ether data collected by Shibata's fleet showed no movement from the Azuchi Castle. Instead, two fleets were on the move. One moving south from Oushuu to Kantou and the other moving south to Sviet Rus's south central region.

"Mogami is protecting Sviet Rus's southern airspace and Date is moving south to deter the Azuchi Castle and to protect the Ariake!?"

A three-hull ship flew through the clear sky. And on top of the Yamagata Castle's bridge, a fox danced with a fan in hand.

She spun lightly in the air and whipped up the wind as she danced to support the guard ships following behind. Next to the fox, a salmon Mouse also flew in arcs through the air.

"Yoshiaki-sama, are you in a good mood, mon!? Could we shift right into an invasion of Sviet Rus, mon!?"

"That would be rushing things a bit much."

Yoshiaki let her clothes billow in the wind as she swept her body around.

"We are moving south to protect Sviet Rus's southern border using the history recreation of an attack on Sviet Rus. By doing that, we can deter anyone from traveling from Kantou to Novgorod."

Meaning...

"If the Azuchi Castle or the Shirasagi try to go to Novgorod, we can knock them away from the side. And of course, once we have determined the risk of that has been eliminated..."

"We will go to visit Komahime-sama at Novgorod, mon!"

"Things are so much easier with you around, Shakenobe."

As she danced, Yoshiaki opened a sign frame.

Righteousness: "The wind has arrived. We'll be going."

Some words appeared on the sign frame from the side and something flew

into the sky from the central deck.

It was a blue god of war. Specifically, it was the Satomi President's Righteousness. The vassal stood on its shoulder while carrying something in a large cloth wrapper.

Flat Vassal: "If you can make it, we'll see you at Novgorod!!"

With the loud sound of the wind being struck, Righteousness left. After watching it leave, Yoshiaki turned to the eastern sky. She saw a white surface in the distance there. That was the Ariake, and...

"Date... Are you finally free to act?"

Masamune felt the wind on the deck of the Aoba Castle, the Date flagship, as it cruised at low altitude.

They had a reason to keep the Aoba Castle so low. It was partially because the blue-painted Date fleet would only look like shadows in the starlight, but also...

"If the enemy does attack the Ariake, either they have to ascend toward its high altitude position or they have to aim their cannons upwards. If we remain below them, we can fire freely. And if the enemy chooses to go to Novgorod..."

Kagetsuna-kun: "Mogami flew on out west, so if the enemy is stopped by them, we can attack them from behind. Isn't that right!? You did it, Masa-chan! You couldn't be playing more unfair!"

"Katakura, you were the one that taught me military strategy."

Kagetsuna-kun: "Oh! You've finally figured out how to play verbal catch, Masamune-kun!? Way to go! But why aren't you denying how unfair this is!? You make it sound like I don't play fair! When Oniniwa-san was trying to punish me for some trivial matter the other day, I played things fair and square by taking his pet cat hostage to escape! Wait, that's not fair at all! But I'm not afraid to bow down in apology! Look, I'm doing a backwards prostration! Are you looking, Masamune-kun? Hmm?"

Masamune silently closed the sign frame.

"Now, then," she said while pulling the large sword from her hip, resting the

tip on the deck in front of her, and straightening her back.

She could see a giant white surface in the sky to the left. It was the Ariake. To erase the aftereffects and buffering from launching the Musashi, repair smoke was rising from various areas and countless metallic sounds could be heard.

She could see something else far ahead.

...The Azuchi Castle.

She opened a sign frame in front of her and zoomed in optically to view the giant ship floating in the sky above Edo Bay. The ship had a small city for the crew and it had just finished preparations to leave port. The loaded cargo created a flat portion on the top of its silhouette, but...

“Aoba Fleet. ...Turn your bows toward the Azuchi Castle’s shortest course to Novgorod and remain on standby.”

Masamune ordered her fleet to standby and took a breath.

The wind was cold.

But not just because it was nighttime.

She had been removed from the Seiryu’s protection.

That blue god of war was no longer protecting her at all times. It was likely repairing its damage in its ether space. She would be able to summon it once that was complete, but nothing would appear if she called for it now.

She had gained some precious time during which she was not protected by anything.

...Would you call it refreshing?

There was a sense of emptiness, but was that loneliness?

She did not know, but...

“Kojirou.”

Kagetsuna-kun: “Yes!? This is the guy who makes things confusing thanks to the similarity between Kojirou and Kojuurou!”

“Pass.”

She closed the sign frame and lightly rotated her shoulders. She acted like something was wrapped around her back and she was throwing it off and then her body slowly trembled.

“...Kojirou.”

She looked up into the cold and clear sky.

“You successfully set Oushuu in motion.”

“That means it’s our turn next.”

The flagship of Shibata’s fleet was waiting in the sky east of Novgorod. Shibata’s giant form stood on the end of the deck with his arms crossed.

“Hey, Fuwa, you tell Hashiba that we need to end Nanao Castle already.”

“Eh?”

Fuwa expressed her confusion behind him, so he looked back her way.

He bent his eyes and formed a gentle smile on his lips before speaking.

“What other choice do we have? We’ve gotta wage war.” He laughed. “Have Toshiie form a wall and secure the east with Mori. Novgorod can act as a shield against Musashi’s weird attack, so let’s land on the area we hold on the south, west, and east. This is going to be a land battle now. It’s a struggle for control of Novgorod. If we take this island, we can hold western Sviet Rus. And...”

And...

“Hashiba said there’s something below Novgorod we can’t let Musashi see and that Holland Chancellor Prince of Orange was headed there, right? ...On Hashiba’s request, we’ve got to control Novgorod, string up that Prince of Orange, and...yeah...”

Shibata gave a full faced smile and ignored the stiffening of Fuwa’s face.

“Let’s crush Musashi’s forces. Got that, Fuwa?”

The Testament Union officially declared the end of the Battle of Nanao Castle

between Sviet Rus and P.A. Oda only after Shibata's fleet had finished landing from east to south Novgorod.

As Testament Union representative, Pope Chancellor Innocentius X announced that the rest of the battle would be a recreation of the Battle of Tedorigawa, and that greatly changed the meaning of the battlefield.

The combined corpse warriors who had been working with Maeda Toshiie's skeleton warriors now began destroying the skeletons while the skeletons began rushing toward Novgorod's city walls which had closed their gates.

As enemy and ally swapped places, Toori's group met up with the Sviet Rus assault unit and started climbing the path up the hill, but it was a long path. And...

"P.A. Oda is firing on the land!"

They did not hesitate to fire in order to destroy the skeleton warriors so they could reach a higher level. Sviet Rus could only provide firing support to secure a front line for their second attempt at landing, but P.A. Oda was firing from beyond the hill to speed up their invasion. Toori's group moved to the northeast side of the hill to stay out of P.A. Oda's way and that slowed them down. And...

"Now, then."

12 minutes had passed since Shibata's fleet had arrived.

By the time Shibata Katsuie set foot on the southeastern field, the Novgorod city and city hall on the hill were protected by the corpse warriors, but the skeleton warriors already surrounded them and were making a multi-stage attack against the defense barriers.

Shibata's main unit was P.A. Oda's primary force and, just like at Magdeburg, they moved swiftly to their destination while making powerful strikes. That destruction grew to a roar, the number of combined corpse warriors dropped, and the defense barriers surrounding Novgorod's city glowed dully.

The battlefield was currently split in two.

One battlefield was the interception unit including Mori's gods of war that

stopped Sviet Rus's invasion on the east.

The other battlefield was the circle around Novgorod at the top of the hill that tried to break through the city's barriers.

Sviet Rus tried to conquer the former, but P.A. Oda used that as a shield while they tried to conquer the latter.

The fall of Novgorod was only a matter of time now.

"Honestly, you always seem to be on the move. You need to stop for some good food and a good night's sleep sometimes. That's why you're so skinny."

A scratchy elderly woman's voice was heard in a red room.

The room belonged to Olimpia who was the current Papa-Schola Innocentius X. The room was filled with piles of books, toys, clothing, models, and musical instruments. The actual floor had vanished below them all and a man sat at the red lacquered table prepared inside.

He was Holy Roman Emperor Matthias. He wore a summer uniform with an apron and he opened the lid of the pot on the table.

"That's because I'm a puppet. I'm always on the move and sightseeing, but I make sure to write letters and contact people. And when I have some spare time nowadays, I try to entertain you while enjoying my hobbies."

"Oh, dear. I thought something smelled good. What is it?"

"Dried beef cooked in red wine and tomatoes. I thought it would be perfect for you since you love red...but what do you think?"

After spreading out a tablecloth, he removed the lid. And as Olimpia sat on the edge of her bed...

"What a rich aroma. But isn't this French cooking?"

"That's because Hashiba was talking about starting her invasion of Mouri. I've been researching the local cuisine lately, so I thought I would try it out."

"Oh, dear. So was I only your second choice?"

"Hashiba seems to like being alone... She seems bound by her master in P.A."

Oda, you see. It kind of looks like she wants to keep as few connections to people as possible. Not being a puppet must be tough.”

Matthias scooped some of the contents into a bowl and Olimpia’s eyebrows rose when she saw the glistening broth. She stood up from the edge of her bed.

“You don’t put flour in it. That’s the royal palace style.”

“Even a puppet has his pride.”

“Then why not hire a bunch of cooks and live a life of luxury?”

“You call that luxury?” Matthias smiled a little. “As a child, I could ask for any dish I wanted, but I got sick of that long ago. After all, I only ever received my favorite dishes and things that suit my tastes perfectly. It was because I did indeed think of that as luxury that I didn’t understand when my brother left to live all on his own.”

“Oh, dear. Are you in a rebellious phase, then?”

“You’ll see when you eat it.”

Matthias passed Olimpia the bowl and a spoon.

The old woman accepted them and took a bite without thanking him. And after a moment...

“It’s spicy...!”

“What do you think? Luxurious, isn’t it?” Matthias smiled. “I look for and find a dish I want to eat, search for and gather the ingredients I think will be best, search for and gather the cooking equipment I think will be best, make my own decisions while cooking, and end up with something that’s so-so or a failure. ... What do you think? Unlike the past, I can create a much more ideal version of the flavor I want. I don’t let someone else provide that reality for me. No matter how hard I work, I can never make something as good as a first class chef, but I can still pursue an even more ideal flavor. ...I have several things I continue to pursue, but I don’t have to be so fixated on them. If I start to want something else, I can abandon cooking. That is what I call luxury. I can acquire anything, but it ends there and I’m not bound by it.”

Yes.

“I can never reach the level of the first class people, but I can still aim higher. That is the luxury of a puppet. It’s wonderful, isn’t it?”

“Ohhhh?” Olimpia smiled with the corners of her mouth and shrugged. “You are quite a dreamer. And all you do is dream.”

“You too live a life of luxury, Olimpia.”

Matthias pulled a basket of bread from below the table. He also took back the bowl he had handed Olimpia and sprinkled some cream onto the meat.

“Now, I think you might like this better. It’s kind of cheating though. Well, repeating this and learning it as a skill will bring me ever closer to the ideal, which should be fun.”

He passed the bowl back to her and opened a *cadena firma*.

“Olimpia, the two of us are puppets, but what I have passed on and you approved is making history right now.”

“We are the unexpected approvers of history, aren’t we?”

“Then again, we have no right to reject it.”

“Oh? If we rejected it, history wouldn’t move, would it?”

Olimpia smiled and Matthias’s expression froze in place. But he soon smiled too.

“You are even better suited to being a puppet than I am. How wonderful!”

“Then can you tell me something? With Hashiba providing logistical support over there, I don’t have Mitsunari and the others to provide commentary. ... What is most interesting about that battle?”

“Well...”

Matthias pointed to the map of Novgorod on his *cadena firma*. He pointed partway up the eastern hill.

“Right here, a strange person named Mori is making a valiant effort.”

Chapter 86: Confirmers of the Footholds

第八十六章

『足場の確認者達』

嫌だと言っても
進まざるを得ないもの
配点（流転）



It must continue

Whether you like it or not

Point Allocation (Constant Change)

Mori fought.

...I need to do my best!

The remnants of the fleet that Sakuma had protected were searching for her down below Novgorod.

Mori felt they had Sakuma to thank for conquering Novgorod to this extent, so he had to extend their control by the time she came back alive.

So he moved and fought alongside the gods of war he inhabited after splitting himself apart.

He was gradually figuring out how to fight on this battlefield. The most important thing was to avoid leaving himself open to an attack, so he kept his movements compact.

“Yes, I need to make compact jabs! Quick jabs! I can’t just swing myself around! Isn’t that right!?”

“Ha ha ha. Mori, that’s really persuasive coming from you. And you can’t be swinging your tentacles around normally either.”

Toshiie had temporarily come down to check things out, but he had returned to the top of the hill.

As for their enemy...

“Date is putting up a surprisingly good fight,” commented Toshiie.

“I-I destroyed 4 of them, but the last 2 have started fighting a purely long-range battle.”

They were firing from a distance as mobile gun turrets while making sure they did not hit the assault unit reinforcements arriving from the north. They could not defeat Mori, but they could destroy the large skeletons, which was a problem. However, they could not protect the region quite as well when he

pursued them.

Toshiie told him not to worry about it and that destruction did not mean death for those skeletons, so Mori stayed far enough away to dodge the bullets from the Date gods of war.

“H-how about that, Master Toshiie!? I can dodge! I’m dodging them!”

“That’s some incredible wriggling.”

“Wriggling!”

...Lady Matsu really likes it...!

Mori was delighted, so he had all of his gods of war wriggle around. The Date gods of war and the Sviet Rus spell unit could not hit him with their physical bullets and spell bullets.

And even just dodging like this was valuable. Not only did it use up the enemy’s ammunition, but as long as he was here, the Date gods of war could not move forward. And without their support, the Sviet Rus warriors could not move forward either.

And whenever they saw an opening, Toshiie’s large skeletons and large apes would move forward to wear down and push back the enemy’s front line.

“Wh-what was this kind of tactic called!? A de-lewd-ing tactic!?”

“That would be a delaying tactic.”

“...Oh. U-um, Master Toshiie! I-I am not a dirty guy! Please don’t misunderstand! I-I just mispronounced it a little is all!”

“Don’t worry about it!”

Lady Matsu is so kind...! thought Mori as he fought.

He had to be careful. If the enemy moved too far away, the ships would start firing.

It was already happening. A largescale impact hit to the left and blew away several skeletons.

That was close, he thought while stepping to the right. *That would’ve been dangerous if it had hit me.*

And then.

“Mori! Not that way!”

“...Eh?”

Had that impact meant something?

He quickly turned around and saw something beyond the dust knocked into the night sky by the impact.

...Vermilion!?

It was a feminine god of war. And...

“That’s Musashi’s...!”

Mori realized what the enemy had done. They had set up a predictable pattern of shellfire in order to disguise the landing of the god of war as a shell hit and catch him off guard.

In a true surprise attack, he could not actively make use of his flexibility, so he could guess the enemy had been trying to do that.

But he had Toshiie on his side and Toshiie’s words had saved him.

...I’m not alone!

With that in mind, Mori faced the enemy while turned to the side.

He sent out the left arm. It was a rotating corkscrew blow that wrapped around the enemy’s arm and threw them.

He had used this to slam the Date gods of war to the ground, so...

“You’re mine...!”

Toshiie saw something unbelievable as he stood at the top of the hill.

As soon as Mori touched the Musashi god of war named Jizuri Suzaku, he disappeared.

...Huh?

It happened too suddenly for Toshiie to grasp what had happened. In fact...

“...?”

Jizuri Suzaku itself and the Musashi 6th Special Duty Officer standing on its shoulder frantically looked left and right.

It was unclear what had happened, but Mori had vanished. Well, his other gods of war were still there, but not the main one.

“Where did the thickest Mori go?”

As soon as Toshiie asked that, Mori crashed down from the sky only about 7 cm to his right.

“Ahhhhhn!”

Dirt flew into the air as he collided with the ground, but Mori immediately got right back up.

“Ah.”

But his body twisted around and he collapsed again. A thick arm trembled 3 cm to Toshiie’s left.

“D-dammit, the impact won’t leave me! I just keep twitching. Th-there’s something wrong with me!”

“Um, Mori, this has been rather thrilling for me, so are you done?”

“Oh, s-sorry, Master Toshiie! I need to pull myself together!”

“Actually, maybe you would have fared better if you let yourself come apart a little more.”

Meanwhile, the 6th Special Duty Officer noticed them, so her god of war prepared to fight. She was about 100 meters away and the god of war tried to hide her behind its face.

Mori also noticed the enemy’s movement. Despite the distance, he stood up and...

“H-here I go!”

He sent his other gods of war toward Jizuri Suzaku. There were 6 of them and

they all used their elasticity to run in a springy sort of way while attacking with their log-like arms. However...

...Eh?

Toshiie saw six figures fly up into the sky.

They were Mori's alternate gods of war. He could tell Jizuri Suzaku had just barely touched them, but that was all.

...Why did that send them flying!?

Then they crashed down just 15 cm behind him.

Naomasa did not really understand.

...What is going on here?

She had tried to counterattack with a throw. She had to say "tried" because those weird gods of war had flown into the sky before she actually got that far.

Only one possibility came to mind:

...Are they actually on our side and are letting me win?

But the primary one seemed serious as it charged toward her.

"Ereeeeeeeeeeeeeeect!"

What is with this? she thought while trying to perform a throw, but as soon as Jizuri Suzaku's hand touched it...

"———!!"

The enemy god of war spun wildly up into the night sky.

Naomasa tilted her head as she heard it landing head-first in the distance. And...

Asama: "Um, Masa? You're looking kind of invincible there."

Smoking Girl: "Yeah, I'm honestly not sure what this is."

"Stickyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!"

It was sent flying before she could even throw it.

Silver Wolf: “Eh? Wh-what is that? I keep hearing these loud crashes down below, but is that Naomasa?”

Smoking Girl: “Well, it’s not so much me as it is the other guy. Oh, excuse me moment. The other 6 are coming.”

“Harrrrrrrrrrrd!!”

They flew away when she merely touched them.

Hori-ko: “Naomasa-sama, are you perhaps enjoying this?”

No, wait, thought Naomasa while placing a hand on her forehead. She had to figure out what was happening between her and her opponent.

Smoking Girl: “Ohh... I think I get it.”

“Thruuuuuuuust!!”

He flew away and Naomasa confirmed her speculation.

Smoking Girl: “I use my opponent’s own power to throw them...but this guy must already be directing his strength in the exact direction I’m trying to use. That means he’s supplying all of the power I would have used to throw him.”

So she only had to slightly touch him in that direction without actually performing the throw.

“Dammiiiiiiiiiiiiit!”

And the enemy god of war flew wildly into the sky.

Smoking Girl: “Yeah, that’s definitely it. Mitotsudaira, he’s even worse than you were back in England. Or rather, he’s really poorly matched against me in close-quarters combat.”

Silver Wolf: “I-I’m willing to spar with you again! I’ve changed a lot since then!”

“Sure, sure,” said Naomasa as the enemy began another charge.

The same thing kept happening, but...

...Throwing him through the air doesn't seem to do much damage...

Naomasa had Jizuri Suzaku perform the throw she had originally tried to do.

With an extremely rapid spin, he flew along a sharp curve and slammed into the ground instead of flying into the air.

“...!?”

For the first time in his life, Mori felt an impact reach his entire body.

The rapid spin caused the blood to gather on the surface of his body. And after spinning upside-down, he thought his entire body was being crushed because...

...She slammed me into the ground!?

Not even his body's elasticity allowed him to bounce as he was slammed so perfectly into the ground.

Instead of feeling an urge to vomit, the impact made him feel like all of his insides were being forced out.

His breathing and even his pulse were shaken, but...

“...Eh?”

He realized he was hanging upside down in the air.

His opponent had grabbed his wrist and swung him upwards to lift him up.

And then he found himself embedded deep into the ground.

Omaeda: “Mori! Mori! To be honest with you, I ran 100 meters away, but are you okay!?”

Mory: “Ah... I-I might...not make it... The ground...is so warm...”

Omaeda: “Don't go to sleep, Mori! Stay with us! And, umm, about your opponent here. Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer is named Naomasa, right? Well, do you know who li Naomasa is?”

Mory: “N-no, sorry. I haven't been with you very long...”

Omaeda: “Right, right. Well, according to the Testament descriptions, there was this battle called the Battle of Komaki and Nagakute, you see? And, Mori,

one of li Naomasa's troops snipes you between the eyebrows and you die."

Mory: "Ehh!? What!? No one told me that! And I don't have eyebrows! Wh-what am I supposed to do about that!?"

Omaeda: "Na-chan? You got a perfect 5 in art, so can you draw some on?"

Lily Flower: "Just so you know, I got that 5 thanks to my sculpting. Want me to carve some in?"

Mory: "No, I-I don't like the sound of that! I like my adorable shape and coloration! B-besides, I've heard rumors about Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer!"

Toshiie asked him what kind of rumors those were, so he answered.

Mory: "Shaja! From what I heard, Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer puffs on a pipe, has a rude way of speaking, always has oil stains on her clothes, has a giant false arm, and is really strong when she gets to fight! You're saying I'll be killed by that collection of negative traits!?"

As soon as he said that, Mori was lifted up and slammed into the ground.

Mori was slammed down and felt like the breath and everything else had been knocked out of him, but he still saw something.

He saw the girl standing on the female god of war's shoulder.

She wore a Far Eastern summer uniform, she held a pipe in her mouth, and smoke escaped her mouth as she spoke into a sign frame.

"What? I'm not playing around. This isn't my idea of fun."

She spoke rudely and her clothes had oil stains and scorch marks in places. Her false arm held onto the side of the vermilion god of war's head and looked like it could punch someone to death.

Mori had previously called her a collection of negative traits, but...

...Ah.

He gasped.

Below the night sky and in the flickering light of the battlefield's torches and fires, he saw her black hair, her angled eyes, her fit build, and her false arm.

...But that isn't all.

He also saw the breasts contained inside the chest band and the lines of her legs and butt showing through her tights.

...This isn't at all like what I know.

She was not like the girls he knew. And he did not mean the P.A. Oda girls he had lived and trained with. He had been forced to experience girls all too much in the past.

“———”

He briefly recalled that part of his past he wished he could forget.

During that former time in that damp space, the things that had violated him had all been slippery, soft, and on the verge of falling away. Calling it “gentle” sounded nice, but he still shuddered when he thought about how it had clung to him without ever leaving.

They had all started by dressing up, acting cute, and treating him and themselves with care, but...

...I was like a pet to them.

They had all looked down on him. And they had tried to use him however they could.

Something sickeningly kind and soft had not allowed him to escape. It had been a constant companion in that dark and damp place.

He was here now thanks to his attempt to forget about and leave that. And...

“...”

This is different, he thought. She viewed him from a height, but she did not look down on him. Hers was a sharp and hostile glare, but she was looking straight at him.

...She reminds me of that time.

She reminded him of when Hashiba had rescued him and faced him below the

sky.

Because Hashiba had looked straight at him on an even level, he had not known what to do and looked away. That was why he had looked to the sky.

He was now embedded in the ground and could not move his head, so he could not look away.

This girl reminded him of Hashiba and the others from P.A. Oda, but...

...She's different.

Hashiba was pretty, but this girl was different. She had more strength than softness, she dressed herself in what she needed rather than what looked nice, and she spoke her mind rather than what people wanted to hear. Her body and her giant false right arm seemed imbalanced.

He felt certain that she was not in *that place*.

She had lived while entirely ignorant of that place.

...Is this the kind of person I was hoping for?

And as soon as he thought that...

"...!?"

Mori felt his pulse begin to race.

Naomasa saw the god of war suddenly bend backwards while embedded in the ground.

Smoking Girl: "Hey, everyone, there's a weird one here."

Marube-ya: "Does that mean P.A. Oda isn't all that different from us?"

Azuma: "Does that mean the world's in trouble no matter which side wins?"

We: "Azuma-kun! Azuma-kun! I feel like you have allowed them to corrupt you a bit lately!"

But as Naomasa glared at the sprawled-out god of war...

"Ah, no, i-it can't be...! It can't be that...!"

Mal-Ga: “What is this?”

Gold Mar: “You probably shouldn’t watch this, Ga-chan. I think it’s just a crazy person.”

Novice: “Eh? He’s not crazy! Don’t you get it!? He’s awakening to the hidden power of his blood! I suppose the rest of you will never understand the confusion that brings...!”

Scarred: “To me, it looks more like he’s filled with joy.”

Girls: “Meaning he’s just plain weird...!”

Asama: “Masa, please. As the Public Morals Officer, I beg you to take care of this.”

Smoking Girl: “I’d really rather not...”

Mori was confused.

...N-no! This i-isn’t right!

His pulse would not calm down.

He was focused on the girl standing on the shoulder of the vermilion god of war in front of him.

Looking up from below, he saw her breasts and the tight line down to her navel. Because she was turned slightly to the side to speak to the god of war, her waist was twisted and her butt stuck a bit out toward him. And as the wind blew at her skirt, he occasionally saw...

...N-no! L-looking is too indecent! ...Glance. Ahh, I’m so dirty!

But her bound hair blew in the wind and came undone. And that longish hair fell down on the bare skin of her back which was left exposed to provide space for the false arm’s connection.

...Wah.

His pulse raced even faster.

This was not right. She was supposed to shoot him between the eyebrows.

And that was not supposed to happen until later. So why was the center of his circulatory system leaping inside him like it had been shot? Could it be...

...That's ridiculous.

Didn't I want to fall in love with, marry, and live out the rest of my life with a much more feminine, beautiful, gentle, and kind person?

At the very least, he had not expected to get along with someone who took part in battles, prioritized something over their own appearance, and fought people. In others words, someone just like him. Not to mention that this person might kill him. But...

.../...

I was wrong, he thought. His life plan and the ideal woman he had imagined in it might have been feminine, beautiful, gentle, and kind, but...

...That's just like the people who once controlled me!

He had not known any other kind of woman, so when he had imagined a proper life plan, he had only been able to hope for someone just like those who had controlled him.

If this person might kill him, that was fine with him. After all, his time in that darkness had been a living death. So...

"...!"

He had found a different kind of person he had never even hoped for.

This was a kind of woman he had never known before. And...

...She's so pretty...

Her muscles and movements were different from his, but there was no waste there and they strengthened her.

So, thought Mori. "If she would open her heart to me...

...A-and guide me...

"N-no. I-I can't...!"

Smoking Girl: "...Not again."

Mal-Ga: "You should finish him off already. I think he actually enjoys being hit."

Me: "Maybe he's fallen in love with Naomasa."

Girls: "No, no. Not a chance."

Smoking Girl: "And Toori. Make any more stupid jokes and I'll beat you up next."

Wise Sister: "Oh? I think he might be onto something there, Naomasa. Too much humility will only reduce your value, you know?"

While imagining things, writhing on the ground, and glancing up toward Naomasa's skirt, Mori thought to himself: *I can't keep this up.*

At this rate I'm going to go crazy.

But it has to be now, he thought. If I let her escape, I might never see her again. So, he continued. I need to say something. But...

...Wh-what am I supposed to say!?

He was not confident enough in his feelings to say, "I love you". And she probably would not want to hear that right now. The battlefield was also a poor place for saying, "Please hear what I have to say."

This was important. Yes, his future was hanging in the balance.

He needed words that would calm this enemy's heart.

He needed some short but comforting words that would gain her trust.

He was a tentacle being. He was a fully pure-blooded tentacle. So he knew generally what to do. In order to calm and comfort her and in order to secure his future, Mori got up and made a suggestion.

"Excuse me! Please let me start by groping you!"

He was slammed into the ground.

...It didn't work!?

Why? wondered Mori. *Should I have gone for a greater impact with my head?*
No...

...She really isn't that sort of person...!

"What a pain. Would this be easier?"

Eh? he wondered just before he flew through the air.

...Ah!

He was not slammed into the ground. She used all her strength to throw him over the edge of Novgorod and into the empty air.

His god of war had no flight device, so he could not avoid falling.

And that would lead to one thing: he would be separated from her.

He would be taken from and separated from her. That was obvious, but in that case...

...Wait.

He panicked. He could tell he was panicked as he was flung through the air. And so he thought, *I want to confirm this.*

He had only just met her. Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer probably only saw him as an enemy, but what did he think? He wanted to demonstrate that.

"U-um!"

After throwing the god of war with Jizuri Suzaku, Naomasa heard it call out to her.

He had been reacting in the most baffling ways, but he definitely faced her as he flew in a parabolic arc.

"W-will we see each other again!?"

Mal-Ga: "Is he asking for a rematch? Well, he looks like a pain since shooting him probably wouldn't do much good, so you can deal with him."

"That's right," agreed Naomasa. And either way, "Sure, I suppose. You seem to be a good match for me, so I'll take you on."

“R-really!? We’re a good match!? Th-then...”

This guy must be a pervert who loves being beaten up, she thought as the weird god of war fell toward the end of the land.

“U-until we meet again!”

“Sure,” she replied as he dropped below Novgorod’s edge. And...

Asama: “So, um, Masa? What was that enemy god of war?”

Smoking Girl: “Hmm. To be honest, I don’t really know.”

She tilted her head. The other gods of war seemed to have split off from that one and they were still active. They could not take control of eastern Novgorod until she crushed them, so she took a breath.

Smoking Girl: “What an annoying opponent...”

With that, she waved toward the Date gods of war and the assault unit reinforcements waiting to the north.

“Anyway, I’ll clear away these obstacles! And after that...”

Skeleton warriors were rising from the ground on the south and all across the hill. If she ignored them, Toori’s group would be in trouble. So...

“We’d like to go on up now, but I’ve got to deal with these things first!”

Just as she and Jizuri Suzaku prepared to fight, an umbrella of light raced through the sky.

“Is that...?”

She recognized that light.

Novice: “Novgorod’s defense barrier was broken! Shibata’s warriors are going to attack the city for the Battle of Tedorigawa!”

“And yet Novgorod and P.A. Oda were working together for the Battle of Nanao Castle.”

Novice: “Aoi-kun’s group is getting close to the city, so P.A. Oda will want to make this an urban battle. But Novgorod hasn’t opened up the city, so they had to go for a more forceful method. They’re planning to do the history recreation

of the Battle of Tedorigawa in Novgorod's city while treating the Volkhov River as the Tedor River."

Meaning...

Novice: "Shibata's forces are finally arriving."

It happened just a few minutes before. Atop the hill south of Novgorod, the unmoving bodies of the combined corpses had littered the ground and a largescale barrier had seemed to dig into the white birch city walls as it surrounded Novgorod in a dome shape.

But the barrier was perfectly vertical near where it reached the ground. The control line producing the barrier could not remain even if it was flush with the ground, so it was made to drop straight down underground from a certain height. So...

"Fall back!"

Someone shouted that and ran away from the southern gate.

It was Fuwa.

She had a reason to run.

She saw a shallow valley in front of her. The city was located a little bit lower than the ground at the top of the hill. The difference was about 2 meters. So straight out from the city gate was a valley with a view of the night sky.

And she saw something in sky horizontally out from Novgorod's gate.

...Shibata's fleet!

They had a simple way of destroying Novgorod's defense barrier.

The fleet concentrated its fire on the vertical portion from a horizontal position.

From above or diagonally, the curved portion of the barrier would divert the power and the bombardment would not be as effective.

This strategy was only possible because Novgorod was a floating city and thus the fleet could take up a position directly horizontal or even lower.

Fuwa's calculations said 27 main cannon class shots focused on about the same point would neutralize a portion of the barrier. Then the engineering students only had to secure a 1.5 meter space that would not receive an ether supply.

It was a simple task, but the setup was far from easy. But luckily...

...Novgorod doesn't rotate at night!

A floating city this large would be affected by the earth's rotation, so it would be quite troublesome if it rotated as well.

But it was night. The main reason Novgorod rotated was to distribute which areas were in the sun, so that did not apply.

Just to be safe, they had let a lot of Sviet Rus's landing fleet arrive at the northern land port and they had made adjustments in order to damage Sviet Rus as well if Novgorod did start rotating. But now only one thing remained.

"Fire!"

Before she could run out of the valley, Fuwa covered her ears while tripping and scrambling back to her feet.

Immediately afterwards, 27 pressures passed by, shaking the sides of the valley.

It was an explosive tremor. It knocked her butt into the air, but she still saw the bright light of the powerful impact.

"———!"

The defense barrier at Novgorod's southern gate shattered.

"So they're here. ...I thought they would use a spell or something after learning their lesson at Magdeburg, but they're using their main fleet as a battering ram? Tactics sure have changed."

In the city hall's dark central hall, Marfa crossed her legs in a large chair and viewed the situation outside on a *sankt okno*.

"So they'll expand the hole in the southern gate, secure a bridgehead, and

then make their attack.”

She opened a *sankt okno* and performed some calculations that told her the enemy would begin invading the city in about four minutes.

“In that case,” she said. “I’ll defend using our warriors. ...The bearers of the coming age aren’t the only ones that can set the battlefield in motion. Even the ghosts of the past can get their feelings across right now. And I’ll prove it.”

Marfa smiled as an explosion rocked southern Novgorod.

“Was that Shibata’s Kamewari? Leave it to Demon Shibata to pave the way all at once like that. He’s so forceful it’s gonna make me cry. ...Cry tears of joy, that is.”

Now.

“It’s time to enjoy history as it unfolds!”

Katsuie smashed through both the enemies and the buildings near the southern gate and he walked forward through the scattering white birch fragments.

His feet were light, but each step was long.

“Nowww, then. Should I head straight there, or should I have some fun first?”

Great Upperclassman: “Toshiie, we’re doing the Battle of Tedorigawa here, but how far does that let us go?”

Omaeda: “Well, Shibata, the Battle of Tedorigawa has us retreating before we actually invade Nanao Castle.”

Great Upperclassman: “C’mon, now. Hurry up and tell me what interpretation we’re using. I’ll reach the edge just by walking at this rate.”

Omaeda: “But, Shibata, if we’re using Novgorod’s city hall as Nanao Castle, then we can’t take control of the city hall and we can’t complete Hashiba’s request to deal with the remains of the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy below the city hall or Chancellor Prince of Orange. Which means...”

Great Upperclassman: “Which means?”

“Shaja,” replied Toshiie.

Omaeda: “I have a suggestion. We should change this battle to the Battle of Uozu Castle which comes next. The Testament descriptions for that battle have us conquering the outer citadel, so we can easily interpret our way into attacking the inside of the city hall.”

“Huh?” said Fuwa just after stepping inside the gate.

She stood behind the P.A. Oda defense unit and the M.H.R.R. warriors who were using with defense spells.

Fuwaa: “Wait a minute! If we do Uozu Castle, it’ll lead to our master’s assassination!”

Omaeda: “But if we don’t do it, Hashiba can’t make her next move.”

Fuwaa: “Eh? You mean we’re restricting Hashiba’s movements?”

What did that mean? Fuwa thought about it and looked up.

Fuwaa: “You mean she’s starting her invasion of Mouri, don’t you!?”

Lily Flower: “Huh? What do you mean by that? Explain it, Toshi.”

Great Upperclassman: “I don’t want an explanation! Who needs explanations!?”

O12: “Oh, dear. Don’t say that, Katsuie.”

Great Upperclassman: “Let’s hear that explanation! I’m all about explanations! Cause I’m not an idiot!”

Thus, Toshiie began explaining.

“Listen,” he began while Fuwa heard to the sounds of gunfire gathering in the distance.

Omaeda: “In the Battle of Nanao Castle, Hashiba withdraws in advance, but she’ll still send us supplies as logistical support. The Azuchi Castle will drop by, give us some of the supplies loaded on in Kantou, and then...”

Fuwaa: “After waiting back at the Lake Biwa base, Hashiba will begin her

invasion of Mouri? ...What about Tottori Castle?”

“Well,” said Toshiie while opening a *lernen figur*. He checked a message board that acted as a P.A. Oda communication board.

Omaeda: “It seems to have fallen bloodlessly. She seems to have taken Tottori Castle in exchange for giving the Reine des Garous the name of Masuda Motonaga, a commander of the Mouri clan. The Reine des Garous is certainly trouble, but now the invasion of Mouri can move to the next stage. But once that happens...”

Lily Flower: “Our master’s assassination, huh?”

Omaeda: “Shaja. You understand what it means for me to suggest we do Uozu Castle, don’t you? And what it means to not restrict Hashiba’s movements?”

It meant...

Omaeda: “Hashiba is thinking that she can rush back from her invasion of Mouri for our master’s assassination. But...”

But...

Omaeda: “What happens if we meet resistance from Sviet Rus at Uozu Castle and can’t head back? In fact, the Testament descriptions say that is exactly what happened. But things are different now and that is not what Hashiba wants. Hashiba is saying this...”

Great Upperclassman: “Every last P.A. Oda warrior needs to finish their preparations and go running to Honnouji?”

Omaeda: “Shaja. That’s right. Hashiba thinks that Musashi and the other nations are bound to interfere with our master’s assassination, so we all need to head there to protect P.A. Oda.”

Fuwa heard Maeda ask, “How about it?”

Omaeda: “We are not protecting our master. We are protecting P.A. Oda’s future. We are protecting P.A. Oda’s foundation so it will not break apart with our master’s assassination and can continue under Hashiba and Mitsunari. And to do that, I suggest we recreate Uozu Castle here.”

“I see,” said Katsuie as he came to a stop in the middle of a Novgorod street.

The street had grass growing in it, the sidewalks were made of white birch, and the houses made of rotting white birch created walls on either side.

It was a dead city, but...

“We’ll be using it for the benefit of P.A. Oda.”

It was true that completing the Battle of Uozu Castle here would allow them to immediately run back during Nobunaga’s assassination. But that method introduced another risk upon completing the Battle of Uozu Castle.

...The other nations and the Testament Union will tell us to hurry up with our master’s assassination.

Great Upperclassman: “Hey, small fries. ...What do we gain by putting off our master’s assassination any longer?”

O12: “Katsuie.”

Great Upperclassman: “Yeah, Lady Oichi, I know. I really do know. Once our master is assassinated...we’ll be forced into a civil war within the Oda clan. Meaning...”

Meaning...

Great Upperclassman: “We’ll be facing the end of these fun times.”

Toshiie heard someone say “hey” on the last slope up the hill.

Down below, he could see and hear the Sviet Rus assault unit reinforcements battling the skeleton warriors, but one voice reached his ears most clearly.

Great Upperclassman: “Hey, Toshiie, small fry, and the other one.”

Omaeda: “...What is it?”

Fuwaa: “Wait!”

Fuwa’s voice reached him.

Fuwaa: “Maeda! Calm down...calm down a little! Why do we have to end

things the way they are now!? We're plenty strong the way we are!"

"That's true," said Toshiie with a bitter smile. But...

Fuwaa: "Don't give me that! ...You know better than anyone that it would be best if things could stay like this! So why are you saying it has to end!?"

Omaeda: "Because of the Genesis Project."

Even over the divine transmission, he had a feeling all of their reactions had frozen.

So he took a breath and scattered some silver coins from his coin roll sword.

Omaeda: "If we don't continue with the Genesis Project, the Apocalypse will arrive. At the very least, that's the foundation of what binds us together."

"Listen," he said.

Omaeda: "The Far Eastern forces are just about settled. Hashiba has already made her preparations in Shikoku and Kyushu, so once she conquers Mouri, the west will be almost entirely controlled by P.A. Oda. That still leaves England and the M.H.R.R. Protestants, but they won't be able to do much since they'll be surrounded by P.A. Oda forces. However..."

However...

Omaeda: "In the east, Oushuu and Sviet Rus have sided with Musashi. That just leaves Tres España and Houjou which are more uncertain and could go either way."

Lily Flower: "So once those are settled, a clear line will have been drawn between the P.A. Oda and Musashi forces?"

Omaeda: "That's right. ...Oushuu and Sviet Rus might be lost causes, but between Tres España and Houjou, I think we can use Tres España's Far Eastern history recreation to work out an alliance or a neutral standpoint. That leaves Houjou, but if we can control them, P.A. Oda will have its greatest possible territory leading into the Apocalypse."

So...

Omaeda: "P.A. Oda won't have to worry about anything getting in our way as

we stop the Apocalypse. To put it another way, there's nothing more for P.A. Oda to do except for controlling Houjou and having Hashiba conquer Mouri. Delaying things too much will cause two problems: it will leave us with less time to deal with the Apocalypse and it will allow our enemies to build up their strength. And if we have no time or power to spare, the other nations can use their cooperation as a powerful bargaining chip."

"So," said Toshiie again.

He took a breath and viewed his surroundings. He was on top of Novgorod's hill, he was surrounded by skeleton warriors, and they were battling Sviet Rus's assault unit down below. Shibata's fleet floated in the southern sky to his right and they were intermittently firing on Sviet Rus's fleet which was landing beyond the hill to his left.

After seeing all those actions, he spoke.

Omaeda: "Let's have fun with it."

Lily Flower: "I wholeheartedly agree."

Fuwaa: "Well, I don't."

Fuwa spoke quietly.

Fuwaa: "I know we have our reasons, I know we benefit from it, I know it would be better in the long run, and I know stopping the Apocalypse is the most important thing. But I still like the way things are now."

"Probably so," said Toshiie with a bitter smile.

Since Matsu pulled over the *lernen figur* displaying Fuwa's words and gently stroked it, she must have been worried for Fuwa too. But...

Fuwaa: "Isn't there some other way!? There has to be. Don't make that decision here on the battlefield. We need to hold a major conference so we can all make the decision together!"

If they did that...

...I expect everyone from P.A. Oda would agree with us.

Fuwa likely knew that.

She may have had a faint hope that everyone would change their minds if they were given the time, but she was mostly driven by a refusal to accept it so suddenly and a desire to reject it.

...So maybe holding a major conference would work.

But as Toshiie considered that...

Great Upperclassman: “Hey, Fuwa.”

Fuwaa: “Eh? Wh-what is it?”

Great Upperclassman: “You should get married.”

Fuwa was just inside the city’s southern gate.

“Ehh!?”

She shouted louder than the surrounding sounds of gunfire, so everyone turned back toward her.

Uh, oh, she thought. And...

“...”

Those who had been viewing the conversation on their *insha kotob* bowed toward her and returned to the battle.

...Wh-what was that weird sign of concern for!?

Fuwaa: “Um, Shibata! Why would you say that all of a sudden!?”

Great Upperclassman: “Because it makes every day so much fun.”

O12: “Oh, Katsuie. I can’t believe you.”

Fuwa started wondering what to do when her superiors were insane and also a couple, but then she asked a question while timing their progress.

Fuwaa: “I’ll admit it can be fun to watch you two, but I’m not sure I’m ready for-...”

Great Upperclassman: “How about with Mori? That’ll give us enough joke material to last us until the Apocalypse.”

Fuwaa: “I don’t think you could find a ruder way of making a suggestion!”

Omaeda: “Unfortunately, I think Mori is into busty girls.”

Fuwaa: “And now you’re being rude to me!!”

Why was it everyone around her averted their gaze?

At any rate, Fuwa took a breath. It was true that had taken care of her gloomy mood. And making a fuss here would not convince anyone. So who was at fault here?

...Is it Mori!?

He packed too much of a punch for a new recruit. But...

...That’s just how it goes with the Shibata group...and the Hashiba group too...

That may just have been how it was, so...

Fuwaa: “Um, all that aside...how exactly are we going to shift from the Battle of Tedorigawa to the Battle of Uozu Castle? Don’t we have to retreat once and head back in for a counterattack?”

Omaeda: “Yes, so our main force will...there’s a gate there, right? Have them step outside of that and head back in. That means we crossed the enemy’s boundary when we left and when we returned.”

Fuwaa: “Wow, that’s pushing it...”

Omaeda: “Well, Hashiba has control of K.P.A. Italia. And retreating and returning is fine, but I hear Niwa went in for healing. So...get to it, Michi!”

Now that he mentioned it, she realized she was the only one. She had found some of their men inside the gate opened in the defense barrier, but she was the only member of their main force.

So from an efficiency standpoint, the quickest route to Uozu Castle was for her to step out through the gate and then back in.

Fuwaa: “...Wait, why me!? I was the one protesting this! Sassa, get in here, leave, and then get back in!”

Lily Flower: If I did that, you’d definitely bitch about it.”

Fuwaa: “Of course I would! You have to be good for at least that much!”

Lily Flower: “Are you picking a fight with me...!?”

Then one of their main force walked through the gate.

“Hello, it’s Mori! My god of war happened to get caught on the edge, so I climbed out and crawled on up here!”

“Stay awayyyy!”

Mori was confused when Fuwa suddenly pointed him away.

“Eh!? Wh-why would you reject me like that!? I-I’m still useful without my god of war! Like when you suddenly want a tentacle on the battlefield!”

“That doesn’t happen.”

“D-don’t be silly! It has to happen every once in a while! Don’t be so mean!! Pun-pun!”

Everyone looked back for a moment before returning to the battle.

Huh? Huhh? thought Mori as an *insha kotob* opened in front of him.

Great Upperclassman: “Hey, Mori, do you feel like marrying that girl in front of you?”

“Eh?”

Mori looked in front of him, but Naomasa was nowhere to be found.

Mory: “There’s a girl in front of me? Where?”

Fuwaa: “And there it is. Today’s extra helping of humiliation...!”

“Eh?”

Mori looked in front of him again. Fuwa was there. Naomasa was not.

...A girl.

Oh, that’s right. Lady Fuwa is a girl, realized the tentacle. But while Fuwa had a low body fat percentage, that was due to being skinny not because she was muscular. That was not the kind of girl he was looking for after that fairly aggressive introduction. So...

Mory: “Well, um... Hmm, how should I put this? Lady Fuwa, uh, you’re my upperclassman and, to choose my words carefully....you lack a certain feminine attraction?”

Fuwaa: “Try choosing them a little more carefully next time, you tentacle!”

Omaeda: “What are you saying, Michi? He can’t help it. Mori loves busty girls.”

Fuwaa: “Yes, yes. Shaja, shaja. Do you like big ones that much, Mori?”

Mory: “Yes, I mean, having her embrace you and gently hold you between her breasts when you sleep is the dream of any tentacle! And it would be great if she would kiss me too! And, um, Master Toshiie, just so you know, my heart already belongs to someone else!”

O12: “Eh? Who?”

Mory: “Eh? W-well, um, I can’t say yet.”

Fuwaa: “Quit squirming!!”

Monkey Girl: “Oh, hello. This is Hashiba. Sorry for interrupting your fun. ... Now that Mori has returned to his home unit, I will request the change from Tedorigawa to Uozu Castle.”

Mory: “Eh? What does that mean?”

Mori looked to Fuwa who pointed at him with her eyebrows tearfully raised.

“It’s all your fault!!”

“Ehh!?”

Just as Mori leaned back, he sensed some darkness.

It was not a color. It was the darkness of the night. The heavens were exposed above him.

“The defense barrier...and even the reserve one have entirely vanished?”

“This...is not looking good. I was hoping to meet up with Hashiba-sama and the others at this supply zone, but...”

In western Novgorod, someone walked west along the path that ran alongside the city wall. Someone wielding twin spears followed her.

“Nori-dono, what do you think?”

“Well,” began Fukushima, #1 of the Ten Spears. “I believe the Sviet Rus forces will arrive from the opposite side. So, Kiyo-dono...”

Then she made a leap.

She landed on the tall wall made of white birch and ran toward the western gate.

After using the acceleration pressure of Caledfwlch, Katou Kiyomasa’s footsteps followed behind.

Fukushima did not turn back as she took the lead. She simply ran forward.

“I feel bad doing this to Shibata-sama and the others, but this is what Hashiba-sama wanted. ...We must destroy the remains of the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy below Novgorod and we must secure the Prince of Orange there.”

“Only secure him?”

“If we have no other choice, we can also eliminate him.”

“Testament.” Kiyomasa nodded. “Since securing him was given as the first option, it is our responsibility if we fail and must eliminate him.”

“You are always so strict with thyself, Kiyo-dono.”

“Well, my ‘teacher’ was too.”

With that, Kiyomasa nodded and Fukushima did the same.

“I am as well.”

The two of them arrived at the western gate. They could see the Jurakudai in the western sky. Fukushima raised her left hand and received some support fire in return.

That support fire hit the area around the western gate and the road leading from the gate to the city center.

The Jurakudai's captain was currently Komahime who had arrived from Mogami.

"It would seem she has prepared herself as well."

When the light of the shells arrived, the two girls leaped toward the road leading from the gate.

Immediately afterwards, they saw an explosion down the road, but it was not from the support fire.

"That was Shibata-sama's...Kamewari, wasn't it!?"

Shibata had reached the enemy. And that enemy was...

"Musashi's 1st and 5th Special Duty Officers!?"

Chapter 87: Divider of the Battlefield

第八十七章

『戦場の分断者』

困った事に
それは状況を
更に複雑にしながらも
心は強さを感じていく
配点（気合い）

Troublingly enough

It both

Further complicates the situation

And brings strength to your heart

Point Allocation (Fighting Spirit)

Tenzou had never felt so hopeless.

He was in the middle of Novgorod's central road, and...

...I have to swordfight Shibata Katsuie-dono to protect Toori-dono and the others as they head to the city hall!?

This should have been impossible according to the history recreation, but it was still happening because they had joined Sviet Rus as mercenaries. He honestly wanted to protest the fight since it did not follow any history recreation whatsoever, but...

"Now, 1st Special Duty Officer!"

Behind him, Mitotsudaira was totally into it, so he could not back off.

...Talk about being stuck between a demonic rock and a lupine hard place!

I just about asked 'how Mitotsu-dire-a situation can the world throw me into', but I don't want to turn into Masazumi-dono.

At any rate, he was using the Ex. Collbrande he had borrowed from Mary to swordfight with Katsuie. And he would swap places with Mitotsudaira who was behind him or occasionally beside him.

"...!"

The silver wolf charged in with her 4 silver chains and her own hands wielding the long swords and spears she had borrowed from the Sviet Rus assault unit. She used the total of 6 blades to attack Shibata. The silver chains thrust the blades in from multiple angles while she made sweeping and stabbing motions with the two in her hands. It was all done with the high-speed snapping motions learned from her mother.

The number of consecutive attacks may have been equal to if not greater than Futayo. But...

“—————”

The rapid instantaneous movements were too much for both her body and the 4 silver chains. Mitotsudaira had never been suited for endurance running and the like, so before she ran out of breath...

...It's my turn!

Tenzou would step in front of her or alongside her to switch from support to attack.

However, he did not use any direct sword techniques. From Shibata's perspective, he would pop out from behind Mitotsudaira, target Shibata's gut from below, circle behind him, and sometimes kick up the stones or sand on the unmaintained road.

He was not playing dirty and he was not choosing the methods of the weak.

...This is a ninja's most effective strategy!

And when Shibata saw that fighting style...

“Not bad, ninja boy!”

“So you like it!?”

“Of course! It's not a real battle if you're not at least this dead-set on winning. And that silver wolf's rapid combination is meant to get through to me. ...How could I not like it?!”

If he liked it, then Tenzou had to give him more of it. This was a tall opponent. He used his ninja sword techniques to do more than cut at his ankles from the ground. He made upwards diagonal slashes, tactics meant for attacking an enemy on horseback, and everything at his disposal.

...It's so incredibly hard to reach him!

Shibata was enduring it all. He would receive all of their attacks and then strike back, so he was one form of the ideal enemy.

But at the moment, they needed to keep the exchange of attacks going. That

would allow Toori's group to reach the city hall, and...

Scarred: "Please do your best, Master Tenzou. We can eat dinner when you get back."

10ZO: "Judge! I look forward to it!"

Asama: "W-wait, Tenzou-kun! That's a death flag!"

Scarred: "Eh? But Lady Asama, I was thinking Master Tenzou and I could watch a movie when he gets back. When I was cleaning, I found one called 'The Tale of Igorilla's Campaign'."

Wise Sister: "Hm? Isn't that the camouflage title my foolish brother gave to that busty blonde porno vi-..."

Asama: "D-don't tell her that, Kimi!"

Gold Mar: "Right, it wouldn't be any fun that way. We need her to play it right in front of him."

Mal-Ga: "And what kind of multi-angle death flag is this? Are you screwing with us?"

10ZO: "Y-you all are the worst! I swear to you I'll come back alive!"

Silver Wolf: "Focus on the battle!!"

But doing things while fighting is a standard ninja technique, he thought just as something else happened.

Katsuie began to move. But instead of exchanging attacks like before...

"How about I mess with your pattern a little?"

He stepped forward.

...Now this is fun.

P.A. Oda has ninjas too, thought Katsuie. But it looks like Musashi's are reaching the commander level, just like with our Ichimasu.

In that way, he was enjoying this battlefield. He was glad to be alive. But...

"I can't exactly lose to someone younger than me!"

Katsuie moved forward with Kamewari in one hand and a short sword in the other.

Then the ninja changed his attack.

...Ohh.

He went for Katsuie's legs. The technique was meant to stop his advance. And instead of aiming down from above, he aimed up from below, which was much more difficult to dodge.

The ninja lowered his hips and gently used his lower legs to control the distance between them. And while falling back, he struck at Katsuie's knees, shins, and sometimes calves.

"Ohh...!?"

The ninja suddenly thrust an attack toward Katsuie's right thigh.

From Katsuie's viewpoint, it was a diagonal jab with the blade tip facing directly ahead.

The distance was hard to grasp from a three-dimensional viewpoint, so it focused more on getting a hit in than the force behind the blow. Also, this weapon could likely split his demonic armor.

...Is that Excalibur!?

Relying on the weapon isn't a bad decision, thought Shibata. *After all, he's up against me here,* he also thought. But he was not going to let the ninja hit him.

"...Toh."

He moved his left leg forward. And he pivoted on that leg to place his left side forward.

The ninja's jab would miss and he would end up stepping in front of Katsuie's turned body. From there, Katsuie only had to cut him down by bringing Kamewari down in his right hand.

He would have taken one of them out in no time at all.

It was too easy, so he decided it was a trap. A ninja at this level would never

be defeated by something so simple.

But he did have to try to defeat the ninja, just in case. So...

“Take this.”

He chose to use a snap of the wrist that held Kamewari. The weapon picked up speed to slice the ninja diagonally from the arm to the torso. The ninja would be unable to dodge while so low to the ground and the attack power would be doubled since it was a counterattack.

He cut. It hit.

...Oh?

He felt the tactile feedback.

Katsuie swung Kamenuki and really did feel it hit.

His hand felt the blade slicing through the ninja’s body and coming out the other side. But...

...What!?

The ninja had not been sliced apart. The blade had not even entered his body. Instead...

“He blocked it!?”

He had chosen defense. Instead of sending Ex. Collbrande toward Katsuie’s inner thigh, he used it along with a short sword he had hidden on the back of his waist. He had crossed them to catch Kamewari, and...

...A substitution!?

He had made it feel like a successful cut. That was one of a ninja’s most famous techniques.

There were visual, auditory, and tactile varieties, but this had been the third. The ninja had caught Kamewari between the crossed blades and pulled back while opening the two blades.

“And that reproduced the sensation of cutting flesh!?”

Tenzou executed the substitution technique with the phrase “attention to detail” in mind.

He was fairly confident in his ability to block attacks. During practice, he would rush ahead with the close-range team and block Oriotorai’s attacks.

...Although she used to send me flying when I failed to block them.

But now he could do it.

The short sword crossed with Excalibur was newly made. It had a thick grip made of a flexible material, the blade was designed for sturdiness rather than a sharp edge, and he had custom ordered it from IZUMO. He had been hesitant to make a main ninja weapon into a support weapon, but it was a good choice with Excalibur in mind.

And he had come to understand two things while exchanging attacks with Katsuie in the current situation.

The first was Katsuie’s physical strength.

And the other was Katsuie’s obsession with battle.

If that demonic man was enjoying a battle, he would go all out, drag it out, and try to have fun with it. So...

...If I make it boring for him, he won’t take it as seriously, but he’ll still make an attack meant to end it right then!

That was exactly what had happened, so he had blocked it. And he had done so with his substitution ninja technique.

A substitution was to create an illusion. The more skilled a ninja was, the less they would rely on the obvious visuals and sounds. Before, Sanada’s Sarutobi Sasuke had caused Katsuie trouble more with his movements than any kind of visual show.

So Tenzou had wondered what would happen if he provided the tactile illusion of cutting through him during this high-speed exchange.

“...!”

Katsuie had definitely been deceived by the illusion, but Katsuie could slice through him an instant with his great strength. It would only create an instantaneous opening. So...

...Mitotsudaira-dono!

That thought was answered by the rattling of chains.

Mitotsudaira circled to his left and in front of Katsuie before making six attacks.

Katsuie saw what his enemy was after.

He was currently turned to the left.

In front of him, the ninja was blocking and deflecting Kamewari which he swung with his right hand.

And beyond the ninja, the Reine des Garous's daughter sent six long swords toward him.

The short sword in his left hand was held out to his left side and he was swinging Kamewari, so he could not defend.

Even if he pushed his right shoulder out toward the silver wolf to guard his head, his side would still be undefended. So...

"Get them! ...Kamewari!"

It was already charged. And he would be fine as long as he did not take a direct hit, so he twisted his wrist to aim Kamewari's blade toward the blocking ninja and the silver wolf.

"...!"

The smashing power raced out and detonated an area covering 30 meters.

Mitotsudaira saw a direct hit coming.

...How forceful!

Thanks to his early morning attack on the Musashi, she had known Katsuie

would use Kamewari to defend, but she had thought he could only do that just before he fled.

This time, he had only just begun his attack on Novgorod. Using an evasion method that injured him as well was simply insane, but...

...Does that mean he hasn't given up on attacking!?

Katsuie had chosen to erase them even if it meant injuring himself.

So Mitotsudaira realized there was no defense or dodging for this enemy.

It was all an attack meant to defeat them.

At this rate, the smashing power would hit her, so she chose a certain method. Mitotsudaira did not stop her six attacks. Just like Katsuie, she chose to pierce her enemy.

“I’ll apologize to Mary later!”

She kicked up the 1st Special Duty Officer in front of her and slammed him into Katsuie.

Katsuie laughed. His breathing was too disturbed for it to reach the surface, but he laughed in his heart.

...Not bad!

He too had once used a small fry as a shield, but this was a little different.

This was fun. He liked it a lot, so he decided to try it himself later.

Musashi’s 1st Special Duty Officer crashed into him from his right arm to his side. It looked like a light blow, but it was surprisingly heavy. There was a simple reason for that: The ninja had picked up on what the silver wolf was doing and moved to hit Katsuie himself.

They were an entertaining group.

Of course, an impact like that was not going to change his stance much.

But the problem was how he had rotated his wrist to aim Kamewari at them. The movement past his elbow was thrown off.

“Fine then! I’ll reward you for that one!”

The smashing power acted like a counterattack from the front right as he tried to move forward.

Mitotsudaira instantaneously guided things to the result she wanted.

She used the right two silver chains to guard against the smashing explosion, but she continued the attack with the two on the left.

“...”

One was deflected by Katsuie’s right shoulder. And the other...

...A blade!?

It had likely been meant to guard against the smashing power created on his own front right, but his left arm circled up above his right shoulder and the short sword it held deflected the long sword held by the silver chain.

At the same time, the smashing power exploded at close range. It was like a pressurized wind of scattering ether light and it struck everything like a physical blow.

The very edge of it scored a direct hit on Katsuie.

The left shoulder he was using to guard was split open and cracks ran through his left arm. But Mitotsudaira also made an attack of her own. She used a snap of her wrist for a high-speed throw of the blade in her left hand.

...Go!

It sliced through the wind in a straight line toward Katsuie’s right side.

His side contained his ribs and a split in the muscles used to bend his body. No matter how much he trained that area, the armor of muscle could not cover the line of that split.

So she targeted it.

But Katsuie moved within the pressurized wind. He lowered his right elbow as if to bring back Kamewari after swinging it forward.

He was using the elbow to either guard against or knock down the sword she had thrown, so Mitotsudaira immediately threw the right sword as well.

“Pierce him!”

The second long sword struck the pommel of the first one in a perfect straight line.

The second strike negated the loss of speed the first one had suffered after being thrown. To Katsuie, the speed of the sword would suddenly shoot far above what he expected. Except...

...His elbow sped up!?

Katsuie’s elbow further accelerated as it took a defensive position.

He had likely lightened the elbow by loosening his hand’s grip on Kamewari.

...An excellent decision!

Mitotsudaira accepted it quickly. Given how unbelievably ridiculous her mother was, she was not surprised to find someone with similar technique and strength. So when Katsuie’s elbow knocked down the double long sword attack, she raised her voice.

“1st Special Duty Officer!”

Immediately, something shot up from the ground.

It was the 1st Special Duty Officer. After colliding with Katsuie and immediately landing back on the ground, he had raised Ex. Collbrande for...

...A second substitution technique!

As a form of invisibility technique, he made himself look like the ground.

And that was why the form that shot up from below looked like a part of the ground, even to Mitotsudaira.

“———!!”

The full length of Excalibur swung as if drawing the moon and it chopped off Katsuie’s right arm at the shoulder.

...I did it!

Tenzou moved his entire body forward as he nearly collapsed after escaping that extreme tension.

In the corner of his vision, he could see Katsuie's right arm flying through the air.

That was due to targeting his armpit from below. Most of the muscles around the shoulder were placed on the top or outside, so the connection at the armpit was weak and had quite a few gaps. Aiming there, he could cut through.

However, opportunities to target the armpit from directly below were few and far between.

But something here had given him that convenient situation.

...It was thanks to Mitotsudaira-dono!

By slamming a heavy series of attacks into him, Mitotsudaira had guided Katsuie into a defensive stance.

And that had allowed Tenzou to make his attack.

For a ninja, a full body attack was the ultimate attack against an enemy on horseback. As an assassination technique, it was a sacrificial strike. But...

"1st Special Duty Officer!"

Tenzou heard Mitotsudaira's voice.

And he saw something: Katsuie was raising a giant weapon.

He held it with his unharmed left hand, but it was...

...His right arm!?

The demonic man had grabbed his own severed right arm and was swinging it as a weapon.

With the sound of shattering chains, Mitotsudaira was sent flying and Kamewari (that was held by the right arm that was in turn held by the left arm) flew toward Tenzou like a spear.

“Kh...!”

Tenzou tried to move his body which had been thrown forward by the slash.

At this rate, he could do nothing to avoid Katsuie’s attack. Even if he drew the short sword he had returned to the back of his waist and used it to guard...

...It wouldn’t be fast enough.

The other Excalibur was defending Mary, so it would not come here.

Oh, no, thought Tenzou. Did I build up too many death flags up to this point in my life?

But if I die here, it will make Mary-dono cry. After all, the movie she’ll try to watch to comfort herself is actually a porn video camouflaged by changing the title. And I chose one that looked as much like Mary-dono as possible. I hope she would realize why I wanted it and simply conclude that boys are idiots, but Naruze-dono would probably call me pathetic and I don’t want that. Maybe I should have left a will asking to have all of my videos disposed of. Oh, but I also have that video of Mary-dono in a yukata from the peaceful festival on the Sviet Rus diplomatic ship the other day... And I’m just trying to avoid facing my approaching death, aren’t I?

“Die, ninja...!”

I’m not going to just because you tell me to, he thought as he pulled back on Excalibur out in front of him. But instead of pulling it toward him, he was pulling himself toward it. And...

...Will I make it in time!?

Mal-Ga: “The ninja’s deeeeeead!”

Mitotsudaira heard an ominous comment from the divine transmission as her silver chains shattered and she was hit by the impact they could not fully block.

Meanwhile, she saw a beam of light deflect Katsuie’s Kamewari.

...An ether cannon!?

Mitotsudaira had been sent flying, so she kicked off the top of a nearby

house's gate wall and propelled herself to the roof while confirming the light she had seen.

She looked to the roof of a house five houses to the northeast and saw who stood there.

“...Ah.”

No one did. But that told her enough.

Mitotsudaira recognized this timing, this attack, and this stealthy movement. So she looked directly to her right on the same building rooftop she stood on.

The dull pain in her side was proof she had a broken rib.

But beyond that pain...

“Trumps 2...Walsingham!?”

Tenzou blocked Kamewari's attack while also dodging.

It was fortunate he had leaned forward as if crawling instead of standing upright.

When Kamewari's tip was diverted upwards, it drew a diagonal line across the right side of his back.

He had his ninja instincts to thank for twisting his body and avoiding having his spine severed. The short sword sheath at his waist shattered and deflected the sword tip toward the right of his back and his shoulder blade, but...

“Delete that videoooooo!

Tenzou shouted what he would do if he survived and then rolled along the ground.

He held Excalibur to his chest and used just his back strength to escape across the sidewalk and to the row of houses Mitotsudaira had jumped to.

And when he looked up, he saw someone standing on the roof.

It was Walsingham.

...Why is England here!?

But as soon as he wondered that...

“It’s a good thing I had them hurry here, Master Tenzou.”

With those words, something pressed against his back without restricting his movements.

They were giant breasts. It was Mary.

There was no point in asking how. Two great speeds raced by overhead. The white and black Technohexen were headed south to deter Shibata’s fleet. The more mobile personnel like him and Mitotsudaira had brought Toori out ahead, but once Novgorod’s defense barrier had vanished, the Technohexen must have carried Mary here. And...

...England is here because...

England traded amicably with Sviet Rus. And...

“Master Tenzou.”

They had Mary.

England wanted to show their friendship toward Sviet Rus and to protect the heir to their throne. Elizabeth must have predicted this and sent the Trumps to Novgorod in advance.

He recalled hearing that a few different countries had been trading with Novgorod and that two countries had not sent their ships away before the battle began, so England must have been one of those.

...And they could join in once Mary-dono arrived.

At the same time...

“Testament.”

A gravity-controlled automaton stood on the rooftop. It was Walsingham. She had created a spear by combining her twin cross swords and passing a handle through them, and that spear was an ether cannon. She was turned to the side so as not to leave an opening while firing and she aimed toward Shibata.

“Bite...!”

A straight line fired from the cross cannon, but...

“Sorry, but could you wait just a moment?”

A voice cut in and the automaton’s cannon blast scored a direct hit. But this direct hit was not on Katsuie. It was on the row of skeletons that had stood up between it and Katsuie.

The skeletons made of white ether burst and Walsingham’s cannon blast was weakened. And...

“I’ll have to do better next time. I unfortunately didn’t buy us any time at all. So...”

Someone in a vermilion M.H.R.R. uniform walked in from the road leading east. It was Maeda Toshiie. And something fell from his lowered hands.

“I’ll have to be very generous at this turning point. Let’s try 50,000 in these narrow city streets.”

With that, the city was dyed in white.

An army of skeletons appeared across Novgorod.

“Mary-dono...!”

Tenzou saw the skeletons rising as close as a few steps away.

The skeletons did not reach them thanks to the sidewalk, but the bottom of the wooden sidewalk was struck by the bones trying to rise from below.

...Kh.

The nearby sidewalk was lifted up from below and around 7 skeletons grew up. Their bodies broke as they appeared, like they were being forced through too small an opening.

They were weak, but they had weapons and could injure their enemies. Mitotsudaira must have noticed that because she shouted from the rooftop.

“Mary!”

He understood why, but Tenzou still felt a little sad she did not call his name

too. But then he noticed that Mary had moved right up next to him.

“U-um, Mary-dono!”

He wanted her to move away for a moment so she could evacuate, so he spoke.

“You’ll get blood on your clothes!”

“I don’t mind. And I’m healing you right now. Also...”

Also...

“I won’t leave a scar. So, um, Master Tenzou? ...Can you move a step forward please?”

He did not understand why, but perhaps that would keep them far enough apart. He took a step forward only for her to follow.

She did not move away.

As he wondered why, he saw the skeletons approaching. He could hear bone striking bone from all around.

“...!”

And as soon as the word “swarm” reached his mind, he saw something else.

A step away, their shadows fell on the gate wall of the houses.

And then that faint dark blue shadow moved. It rippled as if it was being lightly tapped from in front.

“It can’t be...”

A samurai appeared from within the shadow.

“Trumps 1...Walter Raleigh-dono!”

Tenzou saw long bangs, hair tied back high on the head, gravity swords hanging from the shoulders and elsewhere, and a large gravity sword resting on the right shoulder. And the owner of all this bowed silently.

“...!”

He then swept away everything around him and charged onto the battlefield.

“Well, we made sure to show up with the bare minimum, but maybe our help wasn’t needed.”

A single large transport ship left the trading port at western Novgorod.

But that ship had changed form. The wooden hull suddenly loosened and fell away as cloth.

And then an angular sail rose from below.

The remaining hull fell away as cloth to reveal its true form.

“This is Pirate Queen Grace O’Malley leaving port in Cavendish’s ship!”

It was a high-speed crayer. Shimmering burst just once from within the angular sail spread out up above. And as it caught the rising pressure and wind, the surrounding sky filled with loud noise.

On the bridge located toward the bow, O’Malley turned back toward the mermaid soaking in the control cradle.

“Cavendish, have we equipped the special armament from Musashi?”

“Testament. Shakespeare has also boarded, so please begin the liberation of Novgorod.”

“I see, I see,” said O’Malley as she pressed her staff against the deck.

She spread her arms and the staff gently floated while remaining standing. The intertwined ivy growing from the tip formed a ship’s wheel spell circle. That was then adorned by images of the wind blowing in four directions.

“Now...”

Just as O’Malley inhaled and grabbed the spell ship’s wheel, accusatory shell fire arrived from the south.

It was from Shibata’s fleet. That fleet still held their position in Novgorod’s southern sky while cooperating with the troops holding the coast, but the few ships standing guard turned their sides toward Cavendish’s ship. They were going to attack with the multiple ether cannons on the side.

“What fools. They express themselves with cannon fire? That’s so sad I think

I'm gonna cry."

O'Malley looked to the arriving shells and spoke.

"Let's get going, all of you! Let's go save the nation that befriended the Fairy Queen!!"

Chapter 88: Ruler of the Comeback Theatre

第八十八章

『逆転劇場の支配人』



今、頬を流れるものは
何だろうか
配点（スパイス）

What is this

Flowing down my cheeks?

Point Allocation (Spice)

Shellfire boomed in the sky and both footsteps and impacts rang through the city.

Katsuie saw Toshiie's ghost warriors standing up and moving around, but he clicked his tongue.

...This right arm thing is a pain.

He was still tensing his right shoulder to tighten the muscles, squeeze the blood vessels, and stop the bleeding. If he relaxed, that strength would leave him and the blood would erupt out, but it actually helped him maintain tension during the battle.

But I really didn't expect them to sever my arm, he thought. I've taken hard hits and been covered in my own blood before, but this is my first time losing a body part.

Some people would be unable to accept what had happened and die of shock from the drop in blood pressure, but...

...Well, I'm not too surprised.

This was the result of his carelessness and his opponents' teamwork. To the opponents who had used a variety of unique conditions to produce the result, this would be a reward, but to him, it was nothing more than unfortunate.

He wanted to discard his right arm if possible, but rehabilitation with a prosthetic would be too much effort. P.A. Oda was going to start moving toward the Genesis Project soon, so he wanted to avoid anything time-consuming.

"Oh, damn... I'm really in an annoying position, aren't I?"

"Huh? What, did you actually catch on? Did getting your arm chopped off after running out ahead finally open your eyes, you idiot?"

Narimasa stood to his right.

Katsuie slapped his own shoulder with his right arm and looked to Narimasa.

“Oh? What’re you doing here, small fry? Worried for your upperclassman?”

“What? Some idiot got carried away and got his arm chopped off, so I came to laugh at him. Obviously.”

“Oh? You were that worried for me, were you? Ho ho... Hehh... Hmm...”

“I really can’t stand it... God, you’re annoying.”

“Eh? Annoying, am I? Then what should I do, Naru Naruuu? Tell me and I’ll fix it. C’mon, just tell me.”

“And now he’s learned how to be creepy on top of annoying.” Narimasa looked forward “But...”

There were corpses there, but they were not the skeleton warriors Toshiie had summoned. They were the combined corpse warriors used by Novgorod. The elites had come out to protect Novgorod’s city hall.

“Hey, small fry. How many does this look like to you? I’ll praise you if you can answer while shaking in your boots.”

“Probably around 3000. And I think there’s about the same number behind us.”

“Wow, that reaction was boring. ...Let’s take a 1000 of them together. Hashiba’s Ten Spears are probably headed for the city hall, so we can probably help by creating a diversion,” said Katsuie. “The Genesis Project will belong to their generation, after all.”

“True enough,” agreed Narimasa as he watched the wave of enemies approaching up ahead. “So how many do you think you can take?”

“Well...”

Katsuie swung his right arm forward and something burst out ahead of him.

“Quit darting around everywhere, you little puppy.”

He smashed some ether cannon light with Kamewari. Beyond that, he could see someone on the wall to the left of the road.

It was Walsingham, England's guard dog.

Narimasa saw the English automaton looking their way.

"Sight."

That meant she had taken aim.

...Is she coming for us?

As he wondered that, Walsingham hopped down among the combined corpse warriors charging down the road. But with the way she moved, he doubted she was going to get trampled to pieces by them. And...

"Wars of the Roses."

The guard dog's cross spears fired countless double-edged knives into the air.

They vanished. She herself sank into the swarm of corpses and all of the knives hid behind that charging group.

"Ho ho?" Katsuie leaned back and smiled. "Nice! An assassination technique!? P.A. Oda's assassin squad could learn from you! Lately, they keep climbing up to the highest spot they can find and just messing around up there!"

"The enemy is here!!"

Narimasa shouted and pointed toward an approaching wind. It was a gravity sword blade.

"Yamanaka Yukimori!"

After he and Katsuie dodged the invisible blade, Narimasa looked to his opponent.

The samurai casually wore an English uniform and Narimasa showed off his teeth in a smile.

"Do you regret temporarily getting P.A. Oda's help to restore your clan!?"

Walter did not respond. He simply walked forward while matching his movements to those of the charging combined corpse warriors.

"...!"

And he sent out a sharp sword strike.

Naito sensed the battle growing more chaotic.

To keep the ships from firing on the city, she and Naruze were firing on Shibata's fleet along with Cavendish's ship from England, but Naito did not overlook what was happening in Novgorod.

...Maybe we're actually pulling it off.

The overall trend appeared to be in their direction.

The skeleton warriors were headed toward Walsingham and Walter in the center, so the battlefield was shifting toward the center. And the combined corpse warriors were pushing in like a wall from the north, so they appeared to be pushing back at the skeleton warriors from the north, east, and west. But...

Mal-Ga: "More and more skeleton warriors keep appearing. And from the outer edges. They plan to attack the combined corpse warriors from behind too."

O'Malley: "That's because Maeda can create a limitless supply of them. ... Hey, don't land on the top of the sail. You'll be blown away when it's highly pressurized."

Occasionally, guided anti-air fire would arrive from the sky. While pursued by the guiding Garudas, Naito circled to the front of Cavendish's ship.

Gold Mar: "Would the bow work?"

O'Malley: "As long as you don't land on the figurehead. Come to the deck and we'll give you some donuts."

Then a white figure turned toward Shibata's fleet. It was Naruze.

She glanced toward Naito.

Mal-Ga: "You're planning on holding a Technohexen tea party? Our wings burn a lot of calories, so we eat quite a bit."

O'Malley: "We've got plenty of gluttons too."

Gold Mar: "Ohhh, then bring Ga-chan and me some marzipan later."

“Okay, okay,” replied O’Malley, but she had more to say.

O’Malley: “But anyway, we’ve got a way of sweeping up those skeletons, so let’s try it out. ...Cavendish! You’ve got everything ready, right!?”

Harp Mermaid: “I would have done it whether you told me to or not. Besides, I’m here as the Number 5 representative, so I can act on my own discretion, O’Malley. So...”

Once Cavendish said that, a noise came from both sides of her ship. It was the sound of several vertical launchers cocking on the sides of the ship. And Cavendish spoke from her piloting cradle in the back.

Harp Mermaid: “Musashi Technohexen, and O’Malley too, thank you very much for keeping the enemy occupied. And Musashi’s Industrial Committee, thank you for transporting these to such dangerous airspace. My ship will now be using a new model of dropped shell on Novgorod.”

Curving lines raced through the sky. Several lines of launching smoke appeared directly overhead as the vertical launchers on Cavendish’s ship released their payload toward Novgorod below.

There were 32 in all. After rising toward the heavens, their tips pierced guidance spell sign frames and they dropped down. They fell toward the night in rapid straight lines.

Harp Mermaid: “Hit confirmed.”

The 32 lines had definitely pierced the city of Novgorod.

Harp Mermaid: “Musashi IZUMO’s 32 carefully-made bamboo spear dropped shells have hit with a margin of error no greater than 20 cm! Activating wide-range anti-ghost armaments!”

Fuwa saw what was happening on the battlefield. 20 meter pillars of bamboo stabbed into the ground as if surrounding inner Novgorod and then all of their sections opened up.

A moment later, largescale destruction hit the battlefield. It seemed to spread

out from the bamboo pillars.

“———!!”

Toshiie’s skeletons rapidly crumbled. And they even raised their arms in joy as they were given a peaceful rest. Fuwa’s sharp gaze raced along her surroundings as the destruction and salvation of the ghosts spread in the blink of an eye.

“What is this wide-range salvation attack!? Did they create some kind of wide-range chemical weapon!?”

But then she realized what their enemy’s attack was. Something was wafting in from the distance.

She could smell it as the aroma reached her nose.

“Curry!?”

83: “Simply sniffing the smell of curry will take you straight to heaven.”

Unturning: “Eh? What is going on...? I really don’t understand this...”

Uqui: “Heh. You still have a lot to learn, Narumi. You’ll be eaten alive on Musashi if you let a little thing like this shock you.”

10ZO: “That doesn’t even begin to explain what’s happening here.”

Vice President: “And whose idea was this!? Don’t throw curry around in Russia!”

Novice: “Heh. Only after surpassing common sense can you find blood-red victory shining in the darkness...”

Vice President: “So it was you!!”

Mitotsudaira was healed by Mary behind a building in northeastern Novgorod while she watched a large group of skeleton warriors given a peaceful rest. The smell of curry filling her nose was hard to deal with, but...

“This is an effective anti-ghost attack, don’t you think, 1st Special Duty

Officer!?”

“Well, we did some tests with the Chancellor’s Officers before, but how to mix this curry is a complete a mystery and only Hassan-dono can make it...”

“Wh-what’s in it!?”

It was useful, but they were unsure if it could be mass-produced. However...

“Um, Lady Mitotsudaira, please don’t move. I’ll give you something to fight the pain.”

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira had the chest of her summer inner suit removed. She had a red swelling below her left breast that was forming a bruise.

“The bone is broken, but I will suck it out through your back.”

“Suck it out?”

Mary demonstrated what she meant by embracing Mitotsudaira’s body. She pressed on the left side of Mitotsudaira’s back, just below the shoulder blade. And then Mitotsudaira felt something on the front of her body, just above the broken bone.

...Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!!

I sound like Adele! she thought, but then something soft pressed against the surface of the pain. It was Mary’s lips. She was embracing Mitotsudaira’s body, and...

“Nn...”

Just as Mitotsudaira felt the girl sucking at her skin, she felt something leaving the pained area. Nothing actually left or seeped out, but the pressure on her back no longer turned her into Adele.

The pain was replaced by an incredibly light feeling.

“Wait, 1st Special Duty Officer! What do you think you’re looking at!?”

“I-I am not looking! I’m really not! The top of my hat only shows my expression, so I see from down here!”

Mary breathed out and removed her lips. She smiled sweatily, pulled some herbs woven into a charm from her skirt pocket, and brought it to her mouth.

She wiped her mouth with it and brought something in her mouth to the tip of her tongue.

“There, that should do it. How do you feel?”

Mitotsudaira moved her left arm and tensed her side, but she felt no pain. The lightness she felt was clearly different from Naito’s pain reduction.

“Your wound caused your flow of ether to grow stagnant, so I sucked out the stagnation. I pushed an empty portion in from your back, so once you’re healed, it should spread out once more and the flow should return to normal. But while I did set your rib in place, it is still broken, so don’t push yourself too hard.”

“Set it? What do you mean?”

“I wrapped ether around it like ivy. ...I practice by tying knots in cherry stems with my tongue.”

“Oh?”

Mitotsudaira looked to the 1st Special Duty Officer, but he was already looking the other way.

Mal-Ga: “So she already knew how to tie knots. I bet someone just imagined something lewd.”

Azuma: “That kind of skill means something inappropriate? How?”

Gold Mar: “Ga-chan, Ga-chan. You can’t afford a nosebleed in the middle of battle.”

At least everyone was doing well. But even if it was temporary, sweeping away the skeleton warriors meant a lot. It would make things easier for her king and the others who had continued on to the city hall. However...

“...!?”

Mitotsudaira saw a large quantity of light.

Boxes of ether light rose from 32 locations in Novgorod as if forming cages. And they rapidly expanded.

...Are those two-way defense barriers!?

This was a Catholic spell, so it would not be Musashi or Sviet Rus's doing it. M.H.R.R. had to be setting up two-way defense barriers for some reason or another, but...

"This is strange," said the 1st Special Duty Officer. "The ghost warriors are being given a peaceful rest by the mystery powder, so why are they surrounding them with two-way barriers so they can't escape!?"

The combined corpse warriors would be inside as well. If they could not escape, the skeletons would be under attack by the curry and corpses, putting them at an extreme disadvantage. However...

...It can't be!

Just as Mitotsudaira realized what was happening, Novgorod was dyed in explosive colors.

Crimson flames detonated inside the 32 barriers.

The trick had been set up by hand. When he landed, Maeda Toshiie had prepared a powder of mostly flour and spell gunpowder and a few of the ghost warriors had dumped bags of it inside the various barriers.

From there, they had lured the combined corpse warriors in.

"...!"

The detonation had been triggered with flint instead of a spell.

Fire had instantly raced across the powder-filled air and created a vacuum and shockwaves inside the closed space. The ghost warriors were blown away, but the combined corpse warriors were also hit by the flames and wind.

Corpses generally did not breathe. But when moving around, they would have an unmoving mass inside their body if they did not keep their lungs moving. So they would open their lungs and bring air inside them just to keep their bodies moving rather than to breathe.

Toshiie's ghost warriors had lured in the combined corpse warriors in order to

have them bring air into their lungs. And that had brought the powder into their lungs too.

“...!!”

Scorched by the flames and explosion, most of them burst into flames from within or had their lungs explode in their chest before they stopped moving.

Once the barriers were deactivated, all that remained were the large apes and large skeletons that had formed from the broken ghost warriors. They all rose to their feet at once in 32 parts of Novgorod.

And Toshiie’s voice rang out to support their rise.

“How about that!? I learned my lesson last time and put this strategy together! I just emerged victorious over the flavor of the gods! I conquered my fear of curry! Oh, the tears...the tears won’t stop! The spices are stinging a little!”

Now.

“Novgorod’s warriors have been halved and we’re stronger than ever! Now go get them!”

O’Malley: “Wasn’t there a mermaid around here trying to impress us about how she could act on her own discretion?”

Harp Mermaid: “Um, yes... I think there was... Want some...snacks?”

Novice: “In my defense, finding victory by surpassing common sense works for the enemy too!”

Four Eyes: “You repeated the same material and failed miserably? You’re useless.”

83: “I will not forgive whoever wasted all that curry.”

Almost Everyone: “It was you!”

Smoking Girl: “Hey, sorry, everyone! I’m dealing with the copies or whatever of that previous god of war, so I can’t help out up there! The demon warriors tried to rush in, but the skeletons showed up and now they can’t protect Toori’s

group!Can someone else hurry over there!?”

Tenzou nodded at Naomasa’s words and analyzed the wind and the sounds around him.

They were the only ones available to help out Toori’s group. Urquiaga and Narumi were already protecting them, but the enemy was too numerous. If England’s forces would hold Shibata’s group’s attention...

...We need to regroup with Toori-dono and head below Novgorod’s center.

He did not know what was there, but it was apparently a crucial secret related to P.A. Oda’s Genesis Project. So...

“Let’s go, Master Tenzou, Lady Mitotsudaira.”

“Mary-dono...”

“Judge. I will be fine if you protect me, Master Tenzou. We can have Lady Mitotsudaira clear a path while we assist her.”

“Judge,” was all he could say. Mitotsudaira put her broken silver chains away in their obelisks and smiled a little while holding the two remaining long swords.

“Let’s get to our true battlefield.”

“Judge,” agreed Mary with a smile and a nod.

That was when Tenzou heard an odd sound. The next thing he knew, Mitotsudaira was looking north.

“Someone’s crying...? It came from my king’s route.”

It was a long, trembling wail.

“I heard about this during our information exchange with Sviet Rus! P.A. Oda has a battle-crazed lady who wails as she destroys the battlefield!”

And...

“Her name is Oichi! ...She is powerful enough to singlehandedly destroy the Asai clan!”

Saitou and the demon warrior elites took the Musashi Chancellor with them to Novgorod's city hall, but he had predicted the enemy's arrival.

It was Oichi.

The other day, this woman had singlehandedly done devastating damage to Sviet Rus's border guard unit and the outer edge division that included the Ikkou-Ikki, so...

...I knew she would be here, but...

"Ah...!"

And here she was. Her black hair fluttered behind her as she kicked up a white spray in the south and ran toward them. She half-dragged the long sword she held and she destroyed any of Toshiie's ghost warriors in her way.

She was crying.

"You're so...mean..."

How were they mean? But the slashes that arrived with her sobs answered that question. She slashed at anything and everything, enemy or ally, and...

...She's severing their right arms as she passes by!?

Saitou knew this was revenge for Katsuie.

He had received a divine transmission earlier saying that Musashi's 1st and 5th Special Duty Officers had fought Katsuie and severed his right arm at the shoulder. He thought that was an incredible victory, but how did the Musashi group view it? Regardless, that event had led to this wailing voice.

"What do I do?"

She stopped 30 meters ahead of them and trembled a little with her head hung low.

"What do I do?" she asked. "If Katsuie's arm can't be reattached, he won't be able to kill me. ...And then I won't be able to believe in my own ending...!"

And so the woman cried. Her shoulders rose and fell as she tried to move. And then...

"...!!"

A hole was opened in her left chest.

A gunshot had pierced through her, creating a hole that widened as if swelling outward.

Saitou's eyes caught the fatal attack supplied to Oichi.

The sniper shot had been fired through the gaps between the arms, shoulders, and sides of the 30 or so people behind him.

Oichi's body wobbled and then went limp. The impact caused all of her muscles to tremble and she could not adequately gather her strength. So...

...We need to get through now.

This was an offering to the comrades they had lost the other day. This would be enough of a flower for them.

So Saitou took a step forward. But he immediately came to a stop.

Oichi should have fallen to her knees, but she had not.

She had stopped at the left shoulder. Her head was lowered and her arms and legs were limp, but her body was dangling in midair as if she were sewn there. And...

...Her wound...

It was being repaired. This was different from healing. The splattered blood returned, the shredded blood vessels were rebound and reconnected, the flesh closed up, and...

"...Ah."

She slowly stood up.

Immediately, three more gunshots hit her. Saitou was too focused to even hear the surrounding shellfire as the bullets slammed into Oichi's body. But...

"———"

Her body was repaired and she got up.

"Can she regenerate?" asked someone behind Saitou.

No, he thought. After all, something behind her was rising above her head.

It was a silver ring made of feathers. It looked like a laurel wreath or an angel's halo, but anyone at Saitou's level had seen something like it before.

"A Testamenta Arma!"

It was shaped like a halo. According to Testament Union information, it was...

"K.P.A. Italia's Caput Fides – Vetus!?"

But that led to a question.

"I thought the Testamenta Arma could only be used inside the nation that owned them!"

"Beginning activation of Caput Fides – Vetus."

Inside Novgorod's west gate, Fuwa operated an *insha kotob* while checking on the situation.

...Looks like this is working.

They had borrowed Caput Fides – Vetus, one of K.P.A. Italia's Testamenta Arma, from Olimpia. Toshiie had brought it over the other day, and thanks to some research by their technicians...

"We had to settle on a forced ley line circulation pathway, but I guess it's fine as long as it works."

Activating a Testamenta Arma required the ether from its nation's Testament. They had initially tried to activate it with the Sixth Testament "Fortitudo" that P.A. Oda owned, but that had failed. Instead, they had copied the ether pattern of K.P.A. Italia's First Testament "Fides". The foundations of an ether pathway had been imprinted in important cities and villages from K.P.A. Italia to here and that connected them to the ether of K.P.A. Italia's Testament with a 30% drop in power.

It was a little lacking in power, but it was effective enough.

Testamenta Arma Caput Fides – Vetus had a certain effect:

"The life of one with faith will be entrusted to that faith."

In other words...

“As long as they have faith, that person will not die from any injury or illness.”

Fuwa sighed on the battlefield.

“That’s right. Lady Oichi isn’t Tsirhc, but there is one thing she has faith in concerning the Testament.”

“What’s that?” asked the tentacle waiting next to her.

Fuwa nodded.

“The Testament itself. ...It says she will die at the hands of Shibata. She has faith in that, so...yes, she has the faith needed to martyr herself for the Testament. That is her wish.”

So...

“As long as she has faith in the gift of death she will be given, she cannot die and cannot even be scratched.”

Saitou saw Oichi stand up with the glowing halo floating over her head.

She had definitely been injured, but she had been repaired, clothing and all.

...Honestly.

He had lost track of how many times he had thought that word today.

“Is this battlefield of man going to test the Zhong Kui with demons, gods, and everything else too?”

As he spoke and time passed, Oichi’s body returned to normal. She planted her feet at shoulder width and then walked forward.

She was coming.

And to do so, she threw what she held in her left hand.

It was the right arm of one of the demons in the assault unit.

The arm was as big as her entire body, but she threw it into the air, leaned forward, and started forward.

As he prepared to intercept her, Saitou thought, *Honestly, I've had to prepare myself for the worst so often now that I'm close to retirement.*

"That is unavoidable."

Oichi would probably appear from behind the thrown arm when it fell.

Would she take the left or the right? Or above? Or would she throw a weapon? After predicting a few moves ahead, Saitou raised his defenses.

Everyone prepared to move. He did, his men did, everyone did.

Finally, he once more heard the surrounding shellfire, crashing sounds, and screams of buildings burning from the explosions.

This was the praise of the battlefield.

And the right arm fell. But without warning...

"Hey, hold on. Treat that thing with more care!"

Someone casually ran out from the side and snatched the falling right arm from the air.

...Huh!?

It was the Musashi Chancellor.

Saitou saw the idiot dragged down by the weight of the right arm he caught before he swung it around so it did not reach the ground. But he ended up spinning around in an unstable diagonal angle.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

He somehow managed to stop himself. And the idiot looked Saitou's way while lifting the demon's right arm in both his own arms.

"Whose is this? I had this happen to me even if I don't remember it, but I'm sure you don't want a scar, so raise your hand if it's yours!"

Everyone exchanged a glance at his carefree question. And then one of the demons who had escaped Oichi to the left raised one of his left arms out of the total of three arms he had left.

The injured demon gave Saitou an uncertain look, but the idiot did not care. As if to say Saitou's permission was not needed, he smiled, nodded, and carried over the arm.

"Man, this thing's huge. Take care of it, okay?"

But as he approached, Saitou saw Oichi behind him.

She was there.

But she too had frozen in place at this sudden development.

She had stopped while preparing to take her first step.

...What is this?

She had lost her chance. The idiot's intrusion had divided the battlefield layout and thrown the timing out of whack.

The woman who wept in battle was off tempo. If she had taken even one step, she might have continued on momentum alone, but that step and the arm she was using as an obstacle had been taken from her.

And so she raised her head.

"————"

Her tearful face looked forward. That teary face turned their way. Saitou gasped when he saw it. He had heard that she never came to a stop in battle, but...

...When Shibata grabs her and stops her, she returns to her senses.

The idiot had done something else. Saitou did not know if it was only a coincidence or not, but he had stopped her initial action.

...I'm not sure what to say.

I am known as a Zhong Kui, he thought. And I can use my experience to predict how a battle will go.

But, he also thought, I lack experience in a battle being stopped before it is fought.

Unable to move, the weeping voice returned to her senses.

And the idiot turned toward Oichi and spoke.

“Hurry on back so you can heal your husband.”

Oichi said nothing. She also did not feel like stopping the tears spilling down her face, so...

“Are you worried?”

She said nothing to that question, but the idiot said more.

“Is something scaring you?”

She definitely felt fear, so she inhaled and answered.

“Of course...” she said while sobbing. “Because there’s no way...that Katsuie’s arm can be fixed.”

The idiot shrugged.

“Hold on a sec,” he began. “Unlike me, your husband looks pretty tough, so he’ll be fine. I can’t prove it, though. ...But if you’re gonna heal him so he can kill you or whatever, then think about it a little.”

“Think about what?”

“Well,” said the idiot. “If he’s able to kill you at any time, then just live out the rest of your life without worrying.”

For a moment, she did not know what he meant. Her heart reflexively called him an idiot, so she looked to the halo over her head.

“As long as this shines, I intend to die.”

“When will it stop shining?”

“When I am dead.”

“Then,” he said. “I hope that doesn’t happen for a long time and that it isn’t yours or someone else’s decision that leads to it. And if we could stop that from happening, that’d be even better. Please.”

But...

“If you’re worried about that plan for the future, then we’ll help you work

through that stress. I mean...how should I put it?"

The idiot handed the right arm to the injured demon and spoke to her.

"You've gotta be a good person."

"...?"

"You're using his ability to kill you as an excuse, but you're worried about your husband."

"I..."

"And I bet he's the same. He uses his obligation to kill you as an excuse to always stay with you."

So...

"Stay with him always. And if that worries you...well, you must want a hell of a lot of happiness. But since we're your opponents right now, we'll help you work through that stress."

"Wait," said a voice. The enemy's elderly commander spoke to the idiot. "Who do you think is going to be her opponent!? Surely not you!"

"Well, it's not like I'm alone. Someone'll come if I call for them."

He clapped his hands twice.

"Heyyy!"

His clapping received no response whatsoever.

Saitou saw the idiot tilt his head.

"Huhhhh?" he said. "Heyyy!"

He clapped again, but even after waiting 3 seconds, there was no response from anyone anywhere.

"That's odd. They'd normally be rushing here."

"Y-you fool! Fine, I'll handle this!"

"Hey, hey. Wait, wait. Old man, if this was an RPG, your MP would clearly be

at 0. And you've used up your last 'Recovery Herb (Makes you feel good and forget the pain)'. If you die, I'll have to make another old man with the character creator, but making an old man would stress me out, so stand back."

He heard a laugh.

It was Oichi. She held a hand to her mouth.

"You could both take me on at once," she suggested.

"Do you make a good shield, old man?"

"It's too soon to give up!"

"D-d-d-d-don't be ridiculous. I-I-I-I haven't given up at a-a-a-a-all. Think about it. I haven't given up on using you as a shield!"

"Curse you!!"

He thought about lecturing the boy, but then a sign frame appeared in front of the idiot.

"Ah!? Seijun!? Don't you have anyone to help me!? Wait, why are *you* mad at *me*!? No, I'd really rather not die on my own! That ain't happening! Besides, I've got an old man with me~ Ah! Don't hang up!"

The idiot continued facing the vanished sign frame for about 3 seconds before turning around. Then he placed a hand on Saitou's shoulder.

"I'll talk with everyone to smooth things over, so you focus on fighting, old man."

"Curse you! Do you...!? Do you not have any idea how to behave on the battlefield!? Dammit!"

He grabbed and shook the idiot by his collar, but then something else happened.

Oichi inhaled, hung her head, and hid her face behind her hair. But instead of fully facing the ground, she showed off a red crescent moon smile through the gap in her hair. And...

"Heh."

She arrived lightly. She used relaxed motions that seemed to have no weight

to them.

...Kh...!

This was not what he had heard about her. He had heard she had more momentum than this and simply swung herself around using her weight, but as she charged in now...

...Is she being thrown around by her emotions!?

She felt joy mixed with unease. She raced forward with a trembling lightness.

Oichi felt a liberating feeling in her muddled heart and she saw something.

After she charged in and swung her right sword forward, there should have been two bodies collapsed on the ground.

But there was not.

...?

Her gentle surprise and frustration was directed at what had caught her sword.

It was a spear. It had a long straight spear tip. A boy held it, and from his back...

“Thank you, Master Muneshige. Although I could have run myself, so you did not need to carry me.”

It was a girl in a Far Eastern summer uniform. She wore a brand new one and her giant false arm was painted the same color.

They seemed to push at Oichi and then they moved away.

Unable to stop her movements, they leaped backwards. After landing, they gently gathered their strength in front of her. The boy who had spoken with her earlier now spoke to them.

“Ohh! It’s Mune Mune and Mune Wife!”

“Judge. ...It would seem we arrived in time.”

The couple stood up and prepared to fight.

...That must be nice.

With that thought, Oichi once more shifted her balance forward. She picked up a fallen sword with her left hand so she now wielded two.

“Two at once is perfect. ...I am kind of cheating, after all.”

The wife looked to the halo over Oichi’s head and frowned.

“Is that...a Testamenta Arma?”

Novice: “An explanation! You want an explanation, don’t you!? If I don’t explain it now, you’ll be in trouble, won’t you!? I bet you will, so I think I’ll explain it for you!”

Gin used the voice input on her sign frame.

“Shut up.”

Novice: “Eek!”

Then Muneshige asked a question next to her.

“Gin, what is that?”

“Judge,” she replied.

This was a Testamenta Arma. She knew she had to explain the details to Muneshige as best she could, so she opened her mouth and gave the most detailed explanation she could of the enemy’s Testamenta Arma.

“With that, she cannot die.”

Mal-Ga: “That nerd could learn a thing or two from such a straightforward explanation.”

“I see.” Muneshige nodded. He lowered his gaze in thought but then looked back up. “So with that, she can’t die?”

“She cannot die.”

“Kamenuki is a pseudo-divine weapon. What if I use this?”

“You will die.”

“I’ll die?”

“Yes, die.”

Asama: “I-I think this conversation is going to drive me crazy...!”

“She’ll go crazy?”

“Yes, crazy.”

Gin ignored Asama’s shriek and spoke.

“Then let us go for it without holding back.”

“Judge, let’s go for it.”

So they went for it.

Chapter 89: The Peerless Out of Range

第八十九章

『間合い外の無双』



一体どうして
ここに
一体どうして
こうして
配点(発揮)

Why am

I here?

Why am

I doing this?

Point Allocation (Exhibition)

Mitotsudaira ran to the distant northern end of Novgorod.

She and the 1st Special Duty Officer (who was carrying Mary) ran across the roofs.

She could smell her king. And more than that...

...This noise!

It was an exchange of swords. She could hear the solid sounds of at least a 2-against-1 battle with the 1 wielding 2 swords. And she also noticed the Tachibana couple's unique scent of Far Eastern food. *Yes, that smell of Far Eastern food with some ham mixed in is characteristic of them and so irresistible.*

But there was something odd about the sounds of consecutive attacks. She had attacked with 6 weapons at once using her silver chains and arms, but this exchange of blows was rivalling that in speed.

...Just how fast are they fighting!?

Muneshige continued the exchange.

The first thing he realized was that Oichi moved in a series of curves. When she swung her weapons around, rotated her body, spun around, and leaped, she never came to a stop and simply maintained the speed and weight of her actions.

He moved around quickly as he faced her. He could not follow her movements and he could not move against them either. If he followed them, she would match her movements to his. If he moved against her movements,

she would make a counterattack.

So he stuck to a straight line and charged forward to tear into her as she spun around.

He had to be careful because Oichi was not using any acceleration spells.

She was fighting through pure martial arts.

She is, thought Muneshige. *She is a lot like Lord Honda Tadakatsu.*

He had to be careful.

She was not as polished as Tadakatsu, but she never stuck with any one action and kept moving to give herself an advantage.

...She does not use an acceleration spell to grasp victory like we do.

She simply fought to grasp what it took to become an expert and she opened the way to victory. But...

“———”

Muneshige reconsidered what he had just thought. When he had said “like we do”, who was the “we”?

He was not sure.

Would she be coming here?

Gin spoke as she briefly lined up alongside him to assist.

“Will Honda Futayo be here?”

If so...

“This should be even more exciting.”

“This party has gotten pretty exciting!”

Katsuie exchanged fire with Walter.

They were not exchanging sword strikes. The dozen or so gravity swords Walter sent out through the air had no actual blades. If Katsuie blocked them with a sword, they would pass right through it, so he had to attack from a

distance, or...

...Go in for a close-range exchange!

A ghost was already carrying his right arm for him, but his remaining left arm was not wielding Kamewari.

“I’ll attack with seven lighter weapons at once!!”

He opposed Walter by throwing out short swords and long swords of Western and Eastern design like he was juggling them. They had all fallen to the battlefield, but they did not all belong to the combined corpse warriors. Some belonged to the ghost warriors and Katsuie would toss them up with his left hand or trap them with his foot and send them up with his knee.

“How about this, you bastard!?”

They both swung, jabbed, and pulled back all of their blades. They would instantly swap them out and sometimes even throw them.

He had a reason for placing those blades in midair. When fighting with a single sword, he would have to move the weapon to the left, to the right, or into the air when he wanted to change from where he was attacking his opponent.

That was only a short distance, but it created a time lag and weighed down his hand.

So he attacked with blade after blade using a snapping motion.

...This is a lot like whack-a-mole, isn’t it?

With that thought, he moved forward. He attacked Walter with seven blades in quick succession. But...

“————”

He could not hit him. Walter simply tilted his body gently and adjusted his grip on his gravity sword a few times. That was all, and yet Katsuie could not hit him.

...Can he see through all this!?

Katsuie attacked where he saw an opening, but Walter understood where his

openings were and rearranged them. He changed his stance for launching his gravity swords so that he could change the location of the openings at his elbows and sides to lure Katsuie in or to avoid Katsuie's attack.

So he used a special kind of footwork. Instead of walking, he alternatively slid his heel or toes along. By doing that, he had free use of his knees and thighs and could remake the openings there.

And when his rearranged stance proved correct, he would grip one of the hilts hanging in the air and...

"...!"

Walter rushed straight in.

But he did not launch an attack. Just as Katsuie was doing, he placed several gravity sword blades in midair and simply placed his fingers on the pommel.

"..."

Instead of pushing them, he made a slight movement that prevented them from falling right away.

That was enough to catch Katsuie. Katsuie was trying to push through with strength and power, but Walter's invisible blades would slip through the small gaps left over.

Simply moving forward caught Katsuie in the counterattack.

Walter was making those small attacks. And once a gravity sword's fuel tank grew empty, he would throw it to stop Katsuie's knee or elbow and to distract him.

...This guy!

Yamanaka Yukimori was a samurai who acted a lot like a ninja. While he was skilled at fighting while withdrawing, he also made excellent battlefield decisions as a commander and had sharp instincts toward survival.

When he had gotten P.A. Oda's help to rebuild the Amako clan for the history recreation, he had ended up with nothing to show for it just as in the Testament descriptions, but he had fought well leading up to that.

He had often fought Hexagone Française's Mouri clan with only a small group on his side, but even when he was captured, he had managed to return alive under his own power. And now...

"Hey," said Katsuie as they exchanged attacks that never hit. "I wish we could've fought like this back in the day."

It would have been quite a bit different from now and it would have meant something different. Looking at it like that made Katsuie feel like he had wasted a lot of his past.

But Walter suddenly sent a sword toward him.

It was aimed at his face.

The sudden silent attack was the first one targeting the very center of his face.

But Katsuie felt like he understood what his enemy was saying.

...That's right.

"Sorry. This is the best we can do. We wouldn't be out on the battlefield otherwise."

He had lost his right arm, but this was his best. That was not bravado; it was a fact.

...I can attack even more than when I had my arm, and I can do it with even more focus and speed.

The lack of his right arm's weight affected his body's balance, but it also lightened his body. He lacked the "power" brought by its weight, but his instantaneous speed had definitely risen. So...

"I see."

Just as he thought about what his opponent was after, Katsuie sensed that something *did not add up*.

...Huh?

He did not know what it was that did not add up, but something was definitely off.

He kept his focus on the battle while the back of his mind subconsciously sensed danger and told him something was not right.

Walter's attack toward his face suddenly shrank.

But it did not stop there.

It ran out of fuel and the blade entirely vanished.

Katsuie was caught off guard.

Walter had targeted his face, but the blade had run out of fuel and disappeared. It was the number of times that sword had been used that had not added up. Their exchange had taught him how Walter used the gravity swords and allowed him to calculate how many times they could be used.

...What?

He could not figure out what this meant and a dangerous doubt entered his gut.

And so he acted on pure instinct. He simply sent his empty left arm forward.

He had reason to do so.

Walter was right-handed and he carried a large gravity sword on the right side of his back.

If he was making some kind of decisive attack, he would use that.

And if Walter was going to swing that large gravity sword resting on his shoulder, Katsuie had to move even faster.

"...!!"

Katsuie lightly clenched his left hand but then straightened the hand at the moment of impact.

The attack stabbed into something hard.

He had broken through the fuel tank in the large gravity sword hilt supported by Walter's right shoulder.

He had needed to rush forward at the very last second, so the spear-like

attack would have been impossible with his right arm intact. It was only possible now that his left arm was his only one.

The momentum tore apart and scattered the large gravity sword hilt.

And the giant invisible blade born from the guard scattered as ether light. The same happened by Katsuie's hand. The ether fuel leaked from the hilt as a spray of light and shined on their surroundings.

He had defended against the enemy's attack, but then...

...Oh, no!!

The large gravity sword was shattering beyond his hand.

But as it shattered and fell apart, it was thrown a little in the air.

This was not just the result of his strength. Walter had lifted up the large hilt with just his right arm.

Where had the enemy's left hand gone?

He could not see it. After all, the large gravity sword had shattered and the blade's ether and the hilt's ether fuel were scattering bright light below him.

Walter's left hand had been thrust forward through the expanding light below.

Katsuie could not tell what his enemy was doing, so he tried to put some distance between them. But he had just thrust his hand forward.

"...!"

His great demonic strength forced his upper body back. If he could pull his legs back too, he would be clear.

He took one step back. And...

"Nh...!"

Something cold passed through the ground at his feet from top to bottom.

He knew what Walter had done. He had stomped on Katsuie's left foot and then used one of the short swords Katsuie himself had left in the air to stab vertically through both their feet.

Katsuie was pinned to the ground by two things: Walter's foot and the short sword.

He was currently leaning backwards.

And Walter had launched a gravity sword on the right while crouching low to the ground.

He was aiming above the leg pinned to the ground. In other words, at the knee. The invisible attack arrived in a straight horizontal line.

...Not bad at all!

So Katsuie moved.

"Let me show you what I can do!"

Katsuie demonstrated a certain action. He used his momentum as he leaned back.

"...!"

Despite the short sword pinning it down, he swung up his foot and performed a back flip.

Both commanders looked up into the night sky as they back flipped on the battlefield of the dead.

Walter had noticed what Katsuie was doing and made a jump of his own.

The short sword Walter had stabbed into Katsuie's foot had the blade facing Walter's direction, so when Katsuie kicked up his foot, it sliced out to the gap between his second and third toes and slipped out from there.

"...!"

It rotated.

But the blade was still stabbed through Walter's foot.

So he arched his back, sped up his flip, and landed with the stabbed foot placed horizontally on the ground. The strong stomp sent the short sword hopping straight up.

But by the time he grabbed the short sword and held it vertically to his right, Katsuie had already landed.

“How about this!?”

A demonic hand was stabbing straight toward Walter’s face.

At the same time, a light arrived from behind Walter.

An automaton stood there. It was Walsingham who had broken herself apart and hid within the combined corpse warriors.

“Did you hide inside the light of the shattered gravity sword to reassemble yourself!?”

“Nice answer.”

A beam of light left the cross sword cannon, grazed Walter’s head, and flew toward Katsuie’s face.

There were three actions.

The first was Walsingham’s cannon. The second came a moment later.

“Lily Flower...!”

Narimasa charged in and smashed the twin cross swords with a kick.

And the third was Katsuie forcibly twisting his outstretched left arm inwards to lift up his shoulder. It was only a slight movement, but it tilted his thick demonic head.

“Great job, small fry!”

His hard black cheek skin was shaved off, but the guard dog’s cannon did not score a direct hit.

Needless to say, Katsuie’s hand did not hit Walter’s face either. Walter had also moved his head to the side.

And so Katsuie used the momentum of his arm twist to bend his elbow inwards.

He intended to pursue Walter with the pointed elbow strike.

But then a new movement intervened.

Just as Katsuie's elbow was going to hit Walter, something arrived from the side.

"Oh, excuse me."

Walter was sent flying to the left by what was more the bottom of a running foot than it was a jump kick.

...Huh?

The person who had kicked Walter away nimbly landed back on the ground.

"Musashi's Vice Chancellor!?"

Eh? thought Futayo as she looked around.

This was the battlefield. She had decided to follow Muneshige and Gin and had set off running, but on the way, she had found what she thought was a shortcut.

...I got as lost as naturally as being swept away by the current of a river...

That must have been destiny. In other words, it was not carelessness.

Good, she told herself. I haven't been careless yet today.

Futayo checked her surroundings. She saw an automaton she had seen in England, she saw Walter who she had just kicked away, and she saw the guy she was fairly certain was named Sassa Narimasa. *I remember because I saw him at IZUMO.* But beyond him...

"..."

She thought it was Shibata Katsuie.

But she did not know any other demonic long-lived, so what if that race all looked the same and had no individual differences in build? And the Shibata Katsuie she knew had two arms, but this demonic long-lived was a little different. No, he was quite a bit different on that front.

So she asked.

“Um.” She tilted her head. “Who might you be?”

“I am Shibata Katsuie, you fool!!”

He scolded me. But what am I supposed to say? You’ve changed a lot, but I guess it was the missing right arm? That probably wouldn’t work.

She chose her words carefully.

“Are you making the switch to being a southpaw?”

“My arm was cut off by your ninja, you fool!”

“Our ninja...? Um, uhh... Oh! The one that stands next to Mary-dono! That ninja!”

I see.

“From what I have heard, that ninja has been constantly feeling himself down below these days. And...!!”

“Eh? I...I had my arm cut off by someone like that?”

Katsuie looked to Narimasa.

“Don’t ask me!?” shouted Narimasa. “How the hell should I know!? He’s a ninja, so maybe he can do it without anyone noticing!”

“I’m honestly a little impressed you could come up with a proper response to that one. ...But, I see. That would be why he was crouching down so much. Oh, and he must have attacked me because I’m just too sexy.”

“Given the size of your chest, Shibata-dono, I suppose you would count as ‘busty’.”

“Ha ha ha,” laughed Katsuie while thrusting Kamewari forward.

Walsingham saw it after she moved away from Narimasa and escaped to a rooftop.

She could determine that Katsuie’s attack had entirely caught Musashi’s Vice Chancellor by surprise. But...

...What?

The girl circled around to Katsuie's side.

Walsingham thought it must have been an acceleration spell, but she could detect none of the wind that accompanied high speeds.

To Walsingham's eyes, it simply looked like Musashi's Vice Chancellor was walking. But Soaring Wings's sign frame was displayed at the girl's feet.

This was a new one. She had shattered the previous one when moving, but...

"...?"

Walsingham was confused. Why was the girl's speed not rising?

And...

...Light?

Musashi's Vice Chancellor's movements were light. They were even lighter than simply walking, so it was more like she was standing still. She stood by Katsuie's side as if she had no weight at all. And so...

"————"

Katsuie moved half a step away.

He was not fleeing. His eyes were somewhat narrowed and directed straight ahead. He was viewing everything around him.

He too had noticed there was something different about Musashi's Vice Chancellor. And...

"Hey. You said you ran here, right? How many steps did it take you?"

Musashi's Vice Chancellor looked puzzled by that.

Walsingham concluded that it was a silly question. Why ask how many steps it had taken after arriving from the Musashi floating in the northern sky?

It would not even work as a trick to distract his opponent. Except...

...Answer?

Walsingham began some abnormal thought patterns. Her Mouse main body hanging from the back of her neck was telling her something about Shibata Katsuie's question.

...Serious!

Musashi's Vice Chancellor was trying to answer it. She briefly looked up, raised her left hand, and started folding down the fingers.

"One, two, three, four..."

As the girl counted, Katsuie took action. He made a horizontal sweep of Kamewari in his left hand.

Katsuie saw it.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor dodged his blade as it rapidly slipped horizontally through the air.

She had used Soaring Wings. But...

...Hold on. What's this!? It looks like fun!

Katsuie had come across a few Soaring Wings users in his considerable combat experience. It and its derivatives were the stereotypical Shinto acceleration spells, so it had long been a popular choice.

It created a cumulative acceleration via purification, so it could only be used with long strokes and it could not pull off changes in direction over short distances. But...

"You...!"

His opponent was relaxed. She had no speed and, instead of walking, only seemed to transfer her body weight over, like she was on top of a pulley.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor broke through 37 instances of Soaring Wings and calmly dodged Kamewari's blade.

She dodged it slowly.

No, she dodged it *because* she moved slowly.

...She lowers and suppresses her speed enough to fully control each and every one of her joints and then she makes the ideal movement!

She did not move quickly. While staying slow, she watched carefully, moved

her body properly, and dodged with the smallest possible movement.

This was the ideal.

It was a technique that only upper level swordsmen could pull off.

Katsuie did not know what method she had used, but she had created an unbreakable Soaring Wings.

She was light.

And she circled to his side once more.

He looked to her face and she looked back at him.

...Ohh.

Her eyebrows were raised and her eyes were firmly focused on him. The way her mouth was shut showed him she was feeling a fair bit of tension.

That was not the look of a coward.

Katsuie recalled when he had confronted this girl at Magdeburg.

He remembered her focusing on defense and putting up an insulting fight.

The cold look on her face back then was nowhere to be seen now.

Instead, he saw a girl's tense and serious expression. She had taken her own fighting techniques too far, so one wrong step and she could kill herself. She had the look of fearing her skill but also trusting in it.

Her own power would not let her grow careless. She would always stay at the top of her game to draw out her full power which could even harm herself.

There was somewhere she could not reach without doing so.

She might die without reaching it even if she did do so.

The look on her face said she understood that, but she still pushed herself and chose the battlefield.

I like that, thought Katsuie. So you've finally arrived here, have you?

"Hey."

He thought about who he should call out to.

But whoever he directed his words to, he had a feeling it would get depressing.

He had promised Lady Oichi that he would have fun with it to the very end.

So he simply moved. His enemy already held her spear at the ready. He certainly couldn't just say nothing and then get taken out.

Okay, he thought. I won't hold back.

He had never held back before either.

After all, Shibata Katsuie was the fierce commander known as Demon Shibata in the Testament descriptions.

If he had been known as a demon in a human body, how ferocious did he have to be to be called that in a demonic body?

If he was going to hold back, it had to be as a demon.

So he took action. If his opponent was going to determine the ideal action and move oddly, then...

"Yeah."

Shibata dodged his enemy's jabbing spear.

He slowly drew out all of his strength but used it to control himself.

His movements were the demonic ideal.

Narimasa noticed Katsuie's "technique".

He had seen Musashi's Vice Chancellor move in what he could call the ideal.

But with Katsuie...

...Is he serious!?

In an instantaneous exchange, Katsuie had measured his enemy's skill. So unlike normal, he did more than just not hold back.

...He added in something extra!

He used his demonic strength not for explosive movement but for calm action.

He made the smallest possible movement at the lowest possible speed. To do that, he had to be perfectly aware of his enemy's attack, perfectly see it coming, and perfectly respond to it.

The Vice Chancellors of Musashi and P.A. Oda slowly swapped places.

It was like a dance performance. It would have looked silly had Narimasa still been inexperienced, but with his skill, he could tell they were making the best possible actions over the shortest distance and he could sense the great thought that had to go into it all. Similarly...

“...Kh.”

They took the best possible action over the shortest distance to apply a lethal blow to their opponent and they took the best possible action over the shortest distance to dodge that.

In that dense space, the strongest attack was met with the ultimate evasion over and over.

Katsuie would dodge a jabbing spear by a layer of skin and send out his own blade alongside it without even ducking.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor would respond by letting the blade pass in front of her eyes by a hair's breadth and then use the pulling back of her hips to pull back her spear while re-aiming the tip toward the demonic long-lived's torso.

Their movements were almost leisurely, but with all excess excised from their movements, there was a lot of tension. But...

...Shibata's pretty damn good!

Musashi's Vice Chancellor was using an acceleration spell, but Katsuie was only using his own strength. He also had only one arm and he was matching things to his opponent's shorter height.

How much strength did all that take? And...

“...Toh.”

Katsuie slowly bent to the right to avoid the spear swung down on his left.

Narimasa had “read” that one too. And so he reached a certain conclusion: Musashi’s Vice Chancellor would lose.

As if to prove him right, her ideal movement – the best possible action over the shortest distance – went exactly where it should have.

Katsuie moved.

While bending to the right to avoid Musashi’s Vice Chancellor’s spear, he raised his left arm to counterattack.

He was not just relying on his strength. He did not use any more strength than necessary, he did not rush himself, he kept his elbow out while sending his arm and blade on the most accurate route, and he pushed them forward.

She reacted by trying to calmly circle to his left side. She tried to dodge his rising left arm and Kamewari like that. But...

“————”

Her pace was relaxed and calm, but she took the long way around.

...That’s right.

He had kept his left elbow held outwards, so avoiding that elbow had eaten up some time.

...You won’t escape my rising left arm fast enough.

But she had avoided Kamewari’s blade. Activating its smashing power here would not help. She was leaning out to the left, which put her outside of Kamewari’s firing range.

So he used the guard.

As Kamewari rose alongside his body, he pushed the guard against Musashi’s Vice Chancellor’s spear as she passed by.

And from there...

“Now, then.”

He threw the spear and Musashi's Vice Chancellor as if placing them on the sword guard.

He tossed them. It was a lot like gently pushing a paper airplane out into the air.

But that action definitely sent her flying. When she twisted her body and rose up a little, he lifted her.

“————”

And he calmly threw her.

The overall distance was 40 meters.

As Futayo flew in a parabolic arc, she searched for the closest place to land.

She found it. She moved her legs over and placed her feet on...

...A pillar!

The wall around a house had been broken in the battle, so just one piece of the white birch wall remained standing, albeit tilted. It was unsteady, but...

“...”

Futayo landed on it regardless.

To keep her body level to the ground, she bent her legs and she killed her momentum while...

...Soaring Wings!

She used her footwork to gently but surely adjust her position on the pillar.

Her eyes were facing forward the entire time. In her current position, up was straight ahead and there she saw Katsuie directing a power toward her.

It was Kamewari.

Narimasa sensed the result.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor would lose.

Her acceleration spell, Soaring Wings, used purification by removing any impurities in the direction of her acceleration.

She needed somewhere to plant her feet if she was to accelerate.

Her current footing had her directly facing Katsuie, but...

...It's gonna collapse.

If she lightly kicked off, she would push it back and it would fall over. She had just landed, so she had to be just barely maintaining her balance.

He knew what she was trying to do. He did not know how she had managed it, but during her ideal movements, she had built up Soaring Wings without it shattering.

So she would use that to charge straight across this long distance. However...

“...”

The pillar would fall over. The momentum she could not fully rid herself of in her landing was pushing at it.

What would happen when she took that first step?

The pillar would definitely collapse and when her feet met empty air, she would stall out. All of her accumulated acceleration would explode and she would be blown away.

Even if she did manage to jump forward, Kamewari's counterattack awaited her.

Even with the accumulation from Soaring Wings, she would have difficulty moving forward faster than Kamewari could activate. After all, she would be smashed as soon the blade recognized her.

Narimasa knew it simply was not possible. But...

“———”

He heard a voice.

It was a song.

Within the calm but dense series of ideal and short actions, Musashi's Vice

Chancellor sang.

“And.”

He heard more.

“Dance.”

In that instant, Katsuie’s voice reached Narimasa’s ears.

He made a counterattack to break apart the girl’s singing.

“Get her, Kamewari.”

After the destruction, the result arrived in silence.

Kamewari’s smashing power had cut through and smashed up everything for 30 meters ahead of him.

Houses had scattered, the road was split, sounds of dust and rubble rang out, and all that noise finally ended.

“Now, then.”

With Kamewari still lowered in his left arm, Katsuie looked back.

He looked a dozen or so meters away just once, but he immediately nodded.

“Over there, huh?”

He looked about 30 meters away.

In the war-torn city, someone was facing away and kneeling on the roof of an old house.

It was Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

She was breathing heavily, unable to control herself, and supporting herself with her metal spear to just barely avoid collapsing.

Seeing her from behind, Katsuie asked a question. Even on the battlefield, his booming voice reached her. And it said...

“Is your heart still not ready to use that Tonbo Spare?”

She did not answer, but he smiled thinly and bitterly.

“No, at your current speed, you’d have a hard time reflecting me in the blade. You should probably increase the spear’s processing speed. And I think I’ll do the same.”

After all...

“How the hell’d you outdo Kamewari’s recognition speed?”

After he said that, Musashi’s Vice Chancellor began to collapse forward.

The deer antler hair decoration on the back of her head split and her hair split, but...

“———”

That was all. She clung to her spear to stop collapsing. And...

“Ha.”

Just as she took a breath and stood up, the front of Katsuie’s left shoulder split open and blood sprayed out.

A tremor similar to the beat of his heart shook his body. But...

“Now that was fun.”

He bent his left arm, his shoulder swelled out, and the bleeding stopped. He had tensed the muscles in his side.

But he moved no further. His left arm had been about half-severed. He could use neither arm now, but...

“Wanna keep at it a little longer?”

“No.” Musashi’s Vice Chancellor took a deep breath. “I have somewhere I must go.”

“I’m just one step along the way then?”

“No. You are a great wall that I will run across wherever I might go.”

“Then you’ll run across me again, huh?”

“Judge. I may have lost this time, but it was a necessary step toward eventual victory.”

Katsuie smiled bitterly.

“True enough. ...It was my left shoulder and your hair. My attack was closer to the center of the body. If we did it again now, I’d definitely kill you.”

But, well...

“I’ve lost use of both my arms this time. Bring Tonbokiri next time and I’ll take you on then.”

“I am in your debt.”

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor bowed, and...

“—————”

She vanished. As she stood up, she must have already started accumulating Soaring Wings. There was no point in trying to follow her by eye. She was already gone.

“I suppose she’s gone on to the friends she needs to catch up with. ...Hey”

Katsuie turned around to find Narimasa waving a hand and saying, “You stink, you stink!” So...

“You son of a bitch!”

Katsuie threw a stone only to have blood spray out again.

Chapter 90: The Peerless Within Range

第九十章

『間合い中の無双』



一体どうして
そこにいる
一体どうして
そうしてる
配点 (回復)

Why are

You there?

Why are

You doing that?

Point Allocation (Recovery)

Sparks scattered on the battlefield to show off the countless high speed actions.

In the northeastern side of Novgorod's city, three forms accelerated their exchange while jumping to and running along the roads, rooftops, and gate walls.

One of those supporting this speed, Gin, knew how dangerous this battlefield was. It was passing the limits of her momentum.

Physical strength was not enough. Muneshige seemed to have realized that too. As he caught Oichi's attacks and sent out his own blade, he positioned himself so as to cover for Gin.

She started to wonder if she was a burden on him, but then she threw out that thought.

If she was dragging him down, there was no point in fighting as a team.

Muneshige trusted her. He trusted that his wife understood what it meant to fight as a team. And it did not mean to decide she was useless and leave.

...That's right.

She had to move, think, and make herself useful.

So she pursued Oichi's swords on the gate wall and rooftops.

Oichi procured all of her weapons on site. As she spun herself around, she would pick them up and attack with them.

The way to defeat her was to keep her away from the ground. Gin and Muneshige took up positions to effectively toss Oichi between them before

driving her to the wall and having her jump up on top of it.

Gin knew her speed could not keep up, but there was enough she could do.

Instead of simply placing Oichi between herself and Muneshige, she only had to pursue Oichi from below.

When the woman ran, she had to stay right behind her to keep her moving. And while Gin pushed at her from below, Muneshige used Racing Toes to restrict Oichi's movements from the left and right.

While driving Oichi upwards like that, Gin now landed on a row of rooftops.

Oichi tried to escape beyond the roofs, but Muneshige circled to the other side to stop her.

They still did not understand the ability of Kamenuki, the spear he had received from Sakai, but its piercing assistance power had been useful in stopping Oichi's movements.

Muneshige weaved the spear tip between Oichi's blades and toward her body.

The blade flew straight and on target, so...

"Hee...!!"

Oichi released what might have been a laugh or a cry and then she swung her body around to dodge.

That was when Gin caught up and made consecutive attacks with her twin swords.

Her arm's swords were surrounded in the ether of a divine protection.

But harming Oichi with this would be difficult.

When these had been hit by Lype Katathlipse, they had been worn down and lost most of their blades. Similarly, a Testamenta Arma like Caput Fides would have a higher level of ether divine protection.

Even when Oichi was wounded, it always slowly closed as if being sewn up.

That meant Muneshige's Kamenuki would have to finish this.

But they say a husband's accomplishments are built on the assistance of his wife, thought Gin.

So she pursued Oichi.

On the gate wall, she targeted the body parts that were slightly slower when the woman moved: the ankles, the knees, and the wrists.

But the enemy spun her body around, leaped, and threw sword strikes with each hand. Predicting consecutive attacks during a rotation was not easy. And Oichi did not just swing the weapons around; she came at Gin from different angles.

...And she sometimes uses her elbows and wrists for a proper slash!

These sword strikes were more than just fast; they contained the strength of the woman's rotation and swinging upper body.

She had cut down so many demons, and...

"This must be how she did it!"

She used her entire body to attack and she would even let her stance collapse when needed.

The way she wept, laughed, and nearly collapsed forward as she moved was all to shift her center of gravity for easier control of her wildly moving body and to make sure she could not be stopped.

If an upright human collided with her, Oichi would have more momentum and she would push right on through. It was simple, but leaning forward extended the reach of her arms and augmented the inertial power of her weapons. Once she built up the momentum of her rotation like this, there was no stopping her.

This was not a human technique. Blocking this with a sword meant to deal with humans would only break the sword.

But Gin blocked Oichi's high speed rotation attacks with her swords and false arms.

She deflected them and swept them away.

Far Eastern sword techniques were made to use human strength to cut away

any power and cut through even a demon. Because bows and swords were weapons made to exorcise and destroy demons, they were offered to the gods.

The daughter of the Lightning Cutter could not give in to a demon disguising herself as a human. So...

“...Ha.”

When she cooled her heart and began to deal with the situation, why was it she found a smile on her lips?

For the first time in a long while, Gin decided not to think too much about it.

She would simply force the enemy into the air and do what damage she could.

Muneshige would do the rest. So...

“———”

She did not call out to him or signal him in any way.

She knew he would do his part, so she did hers.

The structure was simple.

Gin pursued Oichi across the roofs. The road was on the left. Muneshige was on the right.

Occasionally, Oichi would make a feint, pretending to be descending to the road, but Gin ignored all of those. She trusted that this enemy was entirely focused on slicing through others and chose to overlook any action that would not allow her to do that.

She simply pursued.

The enemy was using two demon swords. They were thick, but they were also long and could possibly even reach Muneshige where he ran to the right.

Then Oichi attacked.

From Gin's perspective, she rotated from the left to the right. This was an attack on Gin that also kept Muneshige away.

Oichi's movements were rhythmic. Her hair swayed and she controlled her entire body so she could send out a series of slashes at any moment.

“...!!”

Gin predicted it. She recognized the timing of the swaying hair and the view of the angles around Oichi's collarbones. There was a slight margin of error, but there was a high probability that...

...A series of slashes is coming...

And they did.

After one and then two sways, a left backhand horizontal slash dropped diagonally from the left to the right. Following that, Oichi continued spinning and made a right horizontal slash that also came from the left to the right.

Gin had predicted the timing of the two attacks, so she moved forward.

She decided to remain turned a bit the left, so...

...I will not hesitate!

Gin leaped forward.

She thrust her left sword forward, targeting the right of Oichi's stomach.

Oichi sped up. She sank down by lowering her upper body in the center of her rotation.

With that, she circled to the right side of Gin's swords. And with a compact rotation, she would make a counterattack on Gin's right blade.

So Gin crouched down as well. While stepping forward, she moved the dodged left blade forward.

Both of the twin swords were passing by on Oichi's right side.

They would not hit, but by thrusting them forward, Oichi could not escape to the left from Gin's perspective.

Oichi was sure to send the blade her way after another rotation, so Gin only had to dodge that, move forward, and send her right sword in from the outside.

But Gin saw Oichi's body tilt even further than expected.

On the right from Gin's perspective, that body tilted outwards as if making a side step.

"Hee...!"

There was a gap between the thrusting left sword and Oichi's body.

A blade arrived through there. It launched up toward Gin like unexpected spray from a wave.

Even though Oichi was still rotating her body, this attack came from almost directly below the gap between Gin's left sword and Oichi's body. Instead of swinging it around, she used a proper snap of the wrist.

This was not the action of someone who had predicted Gin would move forward.

She had forcibly responded after the fact.

Oichi's blade was scooped upwards and flew up to split Gin's jaw.

This was a counterattack against someone moving forward, so...

"..."

Gin removed her left false arm.

She twisted her body to the right.

Oichi's blade passed between the false arm and her shoulder.

Oichi circled far to the right while continuing to swing the blade upwards.

So Gin swung her right blade.

The right false arm had pulled at her and affected her balance, but she supported herself by placing her right knee on the roof. And she swung her other blade to lop Oichi's legs off at the base.

"————"

But Oichi disappeared.

No, Gin saw something up above.

Oichi had jumped. After rotating her entire body, she had jumped straight up, which should have been impossible.

...Did she let the upwards swinging sword pull her up!?

Oichi spun through the air with incredible speed.

Before she could begin falling, she focused on Gin who was crouched low and swinging a blade inwards.

“...”

Oichi's left sword flew in a backhand swing from a bit to the left.

The sword strike from the sky targeted Gin's face.

It came at the perfect counterattack timing, so Gin could not dodge it. And so she made up her mind.

She removed her right arm that had missed its target.

She released it.

The right arm flew off and her body grew lighter. So she bent backwards and Oichi's blade swept through the air right in front of her eyes.

Oichi landed while swinging the previous right sword.

Without erasing the momentum of swinging her now-detached right arm, she let her body flow to the left while still leaning back.

And that brought her left shoulder to...

“Reconnect.”

The left false arm she had detached earlier.

It connected and she used the left twin sword as a counterattack against Oichi's right sword.

The sword shattered, but that was okay. Gin then opened her hand.

...One!!

And she forcibly caught Oichi's blade with the false arm.

The giant arm could function as a shield, but the large sword blade tore

halfway through it.

Steel flew with the sound of scattering metal. But...

...I stopped it!!

Oichi's right blade was not moving. And so Oichi let go of it. She placed her right hand on the sword in her left arm and started swinging it around with both arms. However...

"Arcabuz Cruz."

Even with the left arm's forearm destroyed, it could still summon one of those.

So Gin summoned it nearby and aimed it at Oichi. The woman was grabbing her left sword with both hands and beginning to spin herself around again.

Firing would hit her.

...Of course, blowing her away here won't kill her.

However, keeping her from moving for even a split second would allow Muneshige to attack.

So Gin fired while raising her voice.

"Master Muneshige!!"

Muneshige responded to Gin.

As soon as Arcabuz Cruz's attack hit, he would supply the finishing blow to Oichi. That would end this.

So he kicked off the roof with Racing Toes and leaped straight toward Oichi.

This would defeat her.

Or it should have. But reality proved otherwise.

Arcabuz Cruz's shell passed over Oichi's head.

Oichi had been spinning around and unable to dodge, but she had suddenly sunk down.

...Is that...!?

Muneshige saw a light. A feather-decorated halo glowed above Oichi's head. It was Caput Fides. That light appeared when Oichi was repairing herself, but...

"Hee...ha...!"

Muneshige realized how Oichi had lowered her stance.

She had used her left sword to chop off her own left leg.

Oichi's sword had no divine protections, so a wound from it would be immediately repaired by Caput Fides. So...

...She cut it off herself!?

There was no use in questioning it. Her left leg was indeed severed above the knee.

And as Oichi collapsed down, she spun around.

"...!"

As her sword shot up, Arcabuz Cruz's shell grazed it and sparks flew.

But it did not hit her herself.

"Ha...!"

With a loud laugh, her knee was absorbed back into place. The blood formed sticky threads, her leg was reattached, and she stood up.

But she did not just stand. She passed her left sword to her empty right hand and grabbed something else with her left hand.

"Gin's twin sword!"

She tore it from the abandoned right false arm's grasp, but she did not use it to attack Muneshige as he rushed in.

She took a large leap away from Gin who had just fired Arcabuz Cruz.

"Hee...!!"

And she threw it.

Gin could not move easily with her false arm shattered and she needed to

load a new shell before firing Arcabuz Cruz again.

So she removed her arm again and took an evasive stance.

Then another blade took flight.

It was a second attack.

Oichi had thrown the sword in her other arm toward Gin.

Gin was in no position to dodge this one too.

Muneshige realized Oichi had two reasons to target Gin even if it meant abandoning all of her weapons.

The first was to make him hesitate. And the second...

“More weapons...!?”

He was answered by a powerful impact erupting behind Oichi.

An explosion had occurred on the street behind her. The deafening shockwave was not due to a spell or a ship firing on the city. It was due to Gin’s Arcabuz Cruz shell.

After chopping off her own leg, Oichi had used the same blade to deflect that shell.

And it had been redirected toward the street where she had been fighting earlier. Combined corpse warriors were literally scattered all over the street. When the shell hit, everything there was blasted upwards.

“Ha...!!”

Oichi spun around on the roof all on her own. Everything on the road erupted up into the air behind her. There were clumps of dirt and pieces of corpses, but there were also long swords, spears, and axes.

The many weapons danced through the air as if to greet Oichi.

Her wailing was no longer lacking in weapons. So...

“———”

Muneshige looked to Gin as the long sword flew her way.

If he ran toward her, he could probably save her. But he leaped toward Oichi

instead.

He could not go to her.

His acceleration spell, Racing Toes, could kick off the dust floating in the air and leap over to her, but doing so would damage his leg and prevent him from continuing the fight against Oichi.

And that may have been why Gin looked to him and smiled.

She understood. She had left everything to him.

And she accepted what that implied. That was their relationship, so Muneshige made up his mind.

He would save her. That was what it meant to him that she had left this with him.

He looked to her. He twisted his body, prepared to kick off the empty air, and held Kamenuki toward Gin to reduce the air resistance.

...If...

If the premonition inside him proved accurate...

“This should work!”

It can't be, thought Gin.

She was certainly happy that Muneshige had chosen her, but she knew that was the wrong decision. Looking away from one's opponent on the battlefield was highly disrespectful. And if he kicked off the air using Racing Toes...

...He will destroy his leg just like before!

She could not believe he would make such a stupid decision.

But she heard a solid sound and then he flew toward her.

And Oichi's blade flew toward her as well.

His leg has to have been broken again, thought Gin. But...

“...”

She tried to embrace him as he approached. She would have to scold him later and she was sure to feel a variety of emotions, but now she needed to embrace him as his wife. Except...

...My arms.

She had no arms. And that must have been why he said what he did.

“It’s okay, Gin.”

Then he embraced her.

She wanted to ask how this could possibly be okay, but no voice left her lips. She simply trembled and...

“Eh...?”

Something unexpected happened. After jumping over to her and picking her up, he moved a few steps.

He was walking. And...

“Now, then.”

He lowered her to the roof where her abandoned right arm had fallen. Oichi had stolen and thrown its sword, but...

“Excuse me.”

He kicked the corner of the false arm to stand it up and he placed it alongside her as if to hide her.

His leg should have been destroyed, but he was moving like normal and doing everything as he always had. What did this mean?

“Master Muneshige...?”

“Oh, sorry. I haven’t finished the task you left with me, have I?”

“Oh, right. ...Judge.”

What was she supposed to say? While she tried to choose between “good luck” or “go get her”, he turned his back but still spoke to her.

“Gin. You are, without a doubt, my goddess of victory.”

Saying that with his back turned was beyond cheating. But before she could blush, he left.

He was off to finish the task she had left with him.

Oichi grabbed one of the weapons flying up into the air. Her right hand held a forward curving sword. She held the hilt, felt the weight on her wrist, and spun her body around. She reached her left hand skyward and toward another falling weapon.

It was an axe. She grabbed for its grip, and...

“...?”

The axe moved away. The metal grip that was polished after much use moved away from her hand all on its own.

She did not understand, but she had already given up on the axe. There were other weapons. As they flew into the air and fell back down, there were dozens she could reach just by lightly spinning her body and taking a few steps.

Including those that had fallen on the rooftops, there were nearly 100.

So she reached out her left hand and spun around as if letting rain pour down on her.

Then she heard a jumping sound. It was behind her. In the direction she was spinning toward, a dry metallic sound rang out.

“...!?”

All of the weapons moved away from her.

The dozens of weapons all left through the air while scattering metallic noises and sparks.

There was more. The ones that had fallen on the rooftops hopped away with more metallic clangs.

One by one, they all flew a decent distance away. It was almost like someone was testing some new power. Like they were gradually grasping how to use some great power.

Then Oichi saw the final weapon hop through the air.

“Hee...”

She did not know what it meant.

This was simply beyond her understanding.

Gin saw what was happening.

...Master Muneshige.

She saw him fly through the sky and deflect all of the weapons. While he was using Racing Toes, he also used...

“Is that...?”

Kamenuki.

Kamenuki’s tip was aimed toward the weapons Oichi had sent flying. Whenever Muneshige took aim with his stance...

“————”

He jumped. But he did not simply leap forward. If anything, it looked like...

“Kamenuki is pulling him...?”

With that question, Gin understood. Kamenuki’s true power was not piercing assistance.

“Does it try to shorten the distance to its target!?”

As the night sky rang with cannon fire, someone could be heard stepping on gravel.

It happened on the rear of Okutama, Musashi’s rear central ship. Specifically, it was at Sakai’s home on the starboard side. The yard was occasionally illuminated by the glow of the cannon fire and alarms and explosions shook the air, but still he spoke.

“It would seem Muneshige-kun has caught on.”

“Judge,” agreed “Musashi” who was sitting on the veranda and managing a

sign frame.

She was monitoring Kamenuki's output.

"It is a weapon, but its ability has more to do with movement than anything. It is a very strange spear. Over."

"That's right." Sakai exhaled smoke from his pipe. "When researching how to augment its piercing power, I managed to get as far as locking onto a target. I figured if I could have it thrust forward on its own, it would make a nice spear for beginners. I wasn't really all that good at using a spear. I'd always left that to Da-chan, you see. But things have changed now that I have to deal with Innocentius, right?"

"Please do not ask that in the present tense. Over."

"Sorry."

Sakai smiled bitterly and "Musashi" sighed quietly.

"You added in a gravitational control spell so it would automatically and rapidly thrust toward the target, so you ended up creating an auto-thrusting spear that provides powerful mobility, didn't you? Over."

"But it'd be way too expensive to use it like a projectile. Especially when they might dodge it. So I made it so it only activates when someone's holding it. Also, it reacts to its wielder's desire to 'reach' the target. But the weird thing is..."

Sakai smiled bitterly again.

"I was trying to make the target lock precise, so it ended up unable to lock onto something as large as a human body when it's moving around. It can only lock onto something the size of a sword or the firewood from the other day. So on the battlefield, it works by assisting your jump toward your opponent's weapon. It's a bit of a failure in that way, but that makes it a good match for me."

Sakai nodded and placed a hand on his chin.

"Now, I hope the Peerless in the West can put up a nice fight."

The battle came down to an instant.

Oichi sensed the enemy was behind her, so she made a backhand blow as if moving her hand behind her.

She looked back and her body followed with a rapid rotation.

But in that instant, she made another movement as well.

As she swung her right arm in a backhand blow, she moved her left hand behind her and toward it.

“Ha...”

Her left hand grabbed the hilt.

As soon as she took it, she accelerated her body and swung the blade toward the front of her body.

That meant she had perfectly slashed behind her from the right to the left.

She doubted she would hit the enemy behind her without actually aiming, but it would have held him off. So she tried to move forward.

She tried to abandon the weapon and leap forward toward the road.

She tried to move to the road where the lost weapons were.

But she recognized something beyond the long sword she had swung around herself with her left hand.

“Ah...!!”

It was the enemy. Just as she prepared to let go of the sword, the enemy placed the tip of his spear on its tip and took a stance meant to stop the blade.

And as soon as they faced each other on the roof, Oichi kicked up and to the right on the bottom of the sword guard without letting go of it.

The sword sliced through the air as it rose over her head on the right.

She decided to begin a new rotation to slam the thick blade into the enemy before her. To do that, she spun herself around for the rotating motion she needed.

“——!?”

However, the enemy was no longer in front of her.

But she knew where he was. She could sense his presence in the wind to her right.

He had swung himself around to the right to keep his spear tip on the sword as it began to spin.

He had locked onto her and would not let her go. With the spear tip as the focal point, he used his acceleration spell to keep up with her rotation.

They spun. Both she and her enemy spun.

“...Here I go!!”

As soon as he said that, Oichi was accelerated.

The enemy spun her sword around with even greater force than her own rotation speed.

He could only accelerate her like this with an overwhelming difference in speed, so she tried to raise her own speed.

“...!!”

But she failed.

Oichi's rotation was destroyed by a slight disturbance.

It was a slight deviation caused by chopping off her own leg earlier.

Her left leg had been repaired by the Testamenta Arma, but in the time between the leg being severed and repaired, it had not experienced the same things as the right leg.

Despite being part of the same body, the left leg had slightly less weariness from movement and it lacked some slight experience in the footholds around here and in the enemy. Conversely, the right leg had not shared the tension of being severed and the relief that came after.

It was such a tiny disturbance that it might as well have not existed at all.

But for an expert like Oichi, it had a devastating effect on her movements.

The slight disturbance was affected and amplified by the enemy's acceleration.

“————”

She tried to forcibly increase her speed and crush that disturbance.

But while her decision did speed up her rotation, she was still only being swung around by the enemy.

“...!”

By the time she realized she could not suppress it, it was too late.

She understood that, but she still let go of the hilt with her right hand and sought the enemy. She tried to grab and grasp him by swinging her hand out at the forefront of her speed.

“Hyah...!”

An attack was inserted into the acceleration and it definitely hit Oichi, knocking her up into the air.

She lost a body part.

Gin watched the woman standing on the roof.

It was Oichi.

She got up and stood tall. Standing in front of her, Muneshige put Kamenuki's blade away and placed the spear on his back, but she only stood there watching him.

He picked up what had fallen to the rooftop and held it out to her in both hands.

“This is the same thing that happened to Lord Katsuie.”

“Right. ...Thank you.”

Oichi accepted it with a smile and held it in her left arm.

It was her own right arm.

That was when a deeply-colored spray burst from her right shoulder. But...

“Hee hee.”

She embraced the arm and spun around as if propelled by her own blood.

“I’m so glad.”

With that, she lowered her head. As if bowing, she leaned forward, hung her head, and hid her expression behind her dangling hair.

“Now I’m the same as Katsuie.”

She laughed again.

“————”

With another instantaneous burst of bloody spray, she disappeared.

There was no point in wondering where to. Muneshige bowed toward the empty air and spoke.

“I hope you can remain so close to Lord Katsuie.”

That was goodbye. So Gin sighed and got up. She properly attached her unharmed right arm and approached him.

“Master Muneshige.”

“Judge. What is it?”

There was a lot she wanted to say. Before, she had thought he had given up on everything to leap to her side.

...But I suppose I was just thinking too much of myself there.

And as she thought that and prepared to speak...

“Gin.”

He spoke instead.

“I leaped over to you first of all earlier, but please make no mistake: I would have done that even without Kamenuki.”

Because...

“As long as I have you, I can make a comeback as many times as it takes.”

“...Please do not think of me as a healer. I am the daughter of a warrior family.

I am an attacker.”

“I know that.”

“No, you do not. Besides, what was with that half-hearted resolution?”

“Not to worry. I will only ever be desperate enough to chop off both arms that one time.”

“I’m certainly not letting that happen a second or third time.”

Gin felt herself blushing as she looked to Muneshige.

“Don’t you have something to say?”

“Judge. ...Amore.”

“Don’t you say it 5 times.” She cut him off. “Say it quietly and just once. ...This is the battlefield, after all.”

“The flow of the battlefield has changed.”

In the sky off the southern end of Novgorod, Naito and Naruze worked with Cavendish’s ship to fire on Shibata’s fleet. The Technohexen were also sending footage of the southern region to the Musashi.

Currently, Shibata’s fleet was sticking to its position in the south and not moving in to land. Asama had put together the information from Futayo and the Tachibana Couple to inform them what was going on with Shibata’s group.

“The ninja was feeling himself down below, so Mitotsudaira kicked him over to sever Shibata’s right arm. Futayo lost and partially severed his left arm. And the Tachibana Couple severed Oichi’s right arm with the power of love. What the hell is this?”

“I’m not sure where Asama-chi is going with this, but I guess the words themselves are easy enough to understand...”

But even if Oichi had fallen back, Shibata was still inside the city of Novgorod and commanding the attack. Toshiie and Narimasa were holding the western and southern ends of the city, so Shibata’s forces had the overall advantage.

“The number of combined corpse warriors is really dwindling now. And

Maeda Toshiie's Kaga Millionen Geist can recruit more warriors as long as he has the money."

"Hey! Latecomer Technohexen!!"

"What is it, ancient Technohexen?"

Below the sail of Cavendish's ship, O'Malley shouted up at them while holding the spell ship's wheel.

"Shibata's fleet is doing something new! This means-..."

An image of a mermaid appeared. She displayed the locations of Novgorod and the surrounding fleets on a sign frame.

"Currently, P.A. Oda is focused on firing on the Sviet Rus fleets beyond Novgorod."

"Why?"

"To prepare to withdraw and to keep Sviet Rus's fleets where they are. When they do retreat, they aren't going to let Sviet Rus pursue them. They're clearing setting this up that way. But," said Cavendish. "P.A. Oda is settling into three different actions on Novgorod as well. The first is the Kaga Milionen-...pff. Sorry, I haven't trained enough to say that without laughing."

Novice: "But it's so cool! You're missing out if you hesitate! Say it with me: Kaga Millionen Geist!"

Hori-ko: "Are you planning to make steamed buns? Anyway, explain this, mermaid."

"Testament. Um, the Kaga-...pff. M-Maeda's forces, Sassa Narimasa, and the other P.A. Oda warriors are holding the area from southern to central Novgorod. They have begun to engage the Sviet Rus assault unit – which includes your Chancellor – as they head northeast toward the city hall."

"Mitotsudaira, Mary, Urquiaga, and Narumi should have regrouped with them, right?"

Naruze seemed to be speaking to herself as she flew forward. Naito followed. The two of them listened to the mermaid speak while they watched Shibata's fleet entering a defensive formation a few kilometers ahead.

“The second action is the continual growth of Maeda’s forces. They hold the east of the city and the hill on the east. The rest of Sviet Rus’s assault units and the Musashi god of war are being held there, so Sviet Rus’s main forces can’t move on.”

Naruze frowned as the mermaid continued.

“And the third action is in northwest Novgorod. The combined corpse warriors have gathered there, but they are being breached.”

“Breachd? By a small group?”

“Based on the information we received from Musashi, it is Fukushima Masanori and Katou Kiyomasa of Hashiba’s Ten Spears. At this rate, they will arrive at Novgorod’s city hall before anyone else. And,” said Cavendish.

“Presently, your Chancellor and his group will be unable to withdraw, even if they do get to the city hall.”

On the battlefield, two gazes raced northward in the northwest part of Novgorod.

To reach the city hall, Fukushima Masanori cut through and dodged the combined corpse warriors while Katou Kiyomasa broke them and charged onwards.

Kiyomasa took the lead atop the wall following the road and Fukushima followed behind her. The enemy would occasionally jump in front of or next to them from the road, but Kiyomasa did not care. She would accelerate Caledfwlch and slam into them to scatter the enemy like a snowplow and continue forward.

Their path might be unsteady and the road might cut to the side or come to an end, but...

“...!”

For Kiyomasa, Caledfwlch’s rear thrusters guaranteed that she would be carried forward.

For Fukushima, the Headfirst Fall acceleration spell kept her flying forward.

The two of them simply hurried and ran, but then Fukushima called out from behind.

“Kiyo-dono! Isn’t it about time we changed places!?”

“No. We are almost to the city hall, so I will take us there.”

Kiyomasa hit a leaping enemy by practically throwing the right Caledfwlch at them.

Rather than slicing through them, she added a twist to smash the enemy to pieces. Without pausing her running feet for an instant, she continued forward.

“You are the better fighter than me. That is why you inherited the name of Fukushima. ...My duty is get you to the city hall with as little exhaustion and injury as possible.”

And...

“Our duty is to carry out Hashiba-sama’s wishes by destroying the ruins of the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy below Novgorod’s city hall. You must also take care of the Prince of Orange, so you have to avoid wearing yourself out.”

“I am in thy debt.”

“Please don’t say that. ...We all form a single team. Because we believe in the Genesis Project and wish to direct this world toward safety.”

With that, Kiyomasa looked up.

“I see it!”

There was a roundabout in front of the city hall for allowing carriages through, but now it was full of combined corpses.

“Then this is my position!”

Kiyomasa frowned and leaped.

“Kiyo-dono!” called out Fukushima while left behind.

“I will deal with them, Nori-san. You continue on in. We will meet again up top afterwards.”

Hearing that, Fukushima inhaled a little and then raised her eyebrows.

“Thou can count on me!”

They both landed simultaneously. But Kiyomasa headed for the enemy while Fukushima jumped over them and ran toward the city hall. She plunged into the darkness there that felt like a gaping maw.

Chapter 91: Dreamers at the Gathering Place

第九十一章

『集合場所の夢持ち人達』

何故
私達はそこに
集うことを選んだのか
配点 (約束)



Why did

We choose to

Gather there?

Point Allocation (Promise)

The white light of a flare rose from the northern end of Novgorod's city.

It belonged to P.A. Oda. That meant they had arrived at the city hall.

One of those who saw it was partway up the hill east of Novgorod.

"Damn, I really need to hurry, but these things are not easy to toss over the edge!"

Naomasa stood on Jizuri Suzaku's shoulder and she had her hands full commanding and controlling the god of war.

She was currently dealing with what seemed to be the support gods of war for the weird one named Mori that had not been much of a challenge at all. The seven of them were having trouble moving properly and tended to wiggle around as they approached her.

Their movements made it clear they were outside of their master's control. They would suddenly bend backwards, shake around, and...

...Just move weirdly in general.

However, the bombardment from Date's gods of war did not do enough damage to blow them away. Their bodies were made from bundles of artificial muscles, so they could avoid or absorb the damage and then heal themselves with their repair functionality.

They were annoying her, so when Naomasa approached them, she would throw them and slam them into the ground.

"Um, Mori? I'd really like it if you stopped leaning backwards, shouting 'ahn' or 'nhee', and twitching like that. It's distracting me from my calculations."

Behind a barricade inside Novgorod's south gate, Fuwa was calculating out their losses in the battle, but Mori quickly shook his head when she made that request.

"Wh-why are you imagining lewd thing when you see me, Fuwa!?"

"You're not lewd; you're obscene. Could you at least not moan?"

"Y-you expect me to get by with only my cutaneous respiration!? Besides, I have to receive all the pain from my separated units to reward their efforts even if I can't control-ahhhhhhhn! Ah, no, no, Naomasa!"

"Maybe I should get some of the engineers to bury you."

"Oh, no need. That's going to happen soon regardless."

Naomasa slammed one of Mori's support gods of war into the ground like a pile driver.

She really wanted to throw it over the edge, but the other gods of war were too close. It would be a pain if they tackled her while she threw the first one.

So she accelerated Jizuri Suzaku's wrists and buried the enemy god of war in the ground from head to waist.

...This is a lot of trouble.

The most effective method was to throw them off of Novgorod. These gods of war could not fly, so they could not get back up if they fell over the edge. She had gotten 9 of them over the edge so far, but she was having an annoying amount of trouble grabbing them now. But...

...If that's the only way, then that's just what I've gotta do!

With that thought, Naomasa prepared to fight. But then a ship from Sakuma's fleet, which had descended to rescue the fallen ships, ascended and carelessly dropped down all of Mori's support gods of war that it had collected below.

"Well, screw you too!!"

As Naomasa yelled up at the ship, the dropped gods of war and the ones still on Novgorod moved in unison. The dropped ones leaped forward as soon as

they stood back up and the others rushed forward to tackle her.

Naomasa frowned as they all attacked at once.

With all of them together, they must have put together some kind of shared mind because they charged forward with much clearer intent and movements.

The Date gods of war fired and blew away two of them, but Naomasa noticed something.

The one she had slammed into the ground earlier was missing. She assumed it had crawled out, but...

...Next to me!?

The ground blasted into the air and it appeared. She did not know what this meant, but it wriggled around as it dug head-first through the ground like a worm.

She did not know what this meant. This was clearly not something a human would do and it was meaningless, but it was so unexpected that Naomasa was slow to react. When the god of war appeared next to her, it was just barely within reach of Suzaku's arm and that only caused her to hesitate further.

And that allowed the enemy in close to her. Not the one next to her, but the four that jumped in through the air.

Oh, no, she thought. Except...

"...Huh?"

The Suzaku's right hand covered her on its right shoulder.

She had not ordered this. And she had set its autonomous control parameters so it would not care what happened to her. But it had clearly moved on its own here.

...What is this?

The Suzaku was developing a will of its own. It had most likely started during the battle with the Byakko and the influence of the Seiryu had further activated the Suzaku's OS.

So Naomasa had to wonder: *Is the Suzaku's will my sleeping sister's will?*

“I don’t know, but things are bad right now either way!”

She thought about how to handle this. Her conclusion was to use both hands to defeat two of the gods of war arriving from above. That left her unable to do anything about the other two or the one next to her. Which meant...

...I’ll have to figure that out once it comes to it!

Just as she started to move, something slammed into the four in the air.

They had been shot from the north.

Smoking Girl: “Asama-chi! Four shots in a row!? What’s got you so excited!?”

Asama: “Huhhh!? Didn’t I just save you there!? Why are you finding fault!?”

But that was not all. A voice filled the sky as those four were blown away.

“Your target is on the ground, Musashi 6th Special Duty Officer.”

With that, a giant windless form passed by from the sky behind her.

Immediately, the four sent tumbling through the air were sliced through.

Whoever had passed by had swung a sword to bisect them.

They had been sliced through from bottom to top when not even Date’s gods of war could do any real damage.

“Satomi Student Council President!?”

Yoshiyasu landed silently on the night field and had Righteousness walk forward.

Ahead, enemy gods of war were approaching and prepared to tackle.

She had sliced through the four in the air earlier, but...

Novice: “Satomi Student Council President! Those gods of war are highly resilient and truly formidable foes, but you just chopped them apart like it was nothing, didn’t you!? What’s the trick!?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. This must be all about compatibility! Yes, compatibility! We’ve found an enemy that is weak to flat girls! So that was the Flat Chest Slash!”

What kind of skill is that? wondered Yoshiyasu as she had Righteousness prepare for a one-handed strike.

Righteousness: “I could tell when my sword hit one of them up in the sky earlier. These gods of war are most likely designed to resemble a creature from the Houjou Association of Indian States, or something similar.”

Wise Sister: “Oh, a snake god, right? The Far East has a lot of snake worship in the east too.”

Asama: “Huh? You mean it’s not the demon of worldly desire, Ma-...”

Wise Sister: “Ra, ra, ra, ra! You were going to say ‘ra’, weren’t you!?^[6] Weren’t you!? Onbashiraaaaa! Or to put it a little more mildly, the 10th sign of the Eastern zodiac! And don’t call it a rooster...!”

Asama: “Eh? No, I wasn’t saying that. I wasn’t saying that at all. I was only saying ‘maa’ to sound like Tsukinowa! Right, Hanami!? Over here! Look over here, Hanami!”

I know what they’re trying to say, but is dodging only after taking a direct hit their traditional form of performance art or something?

But...

Flat Vassal: “What do you mean the Satomi President knows exactly how to handle the 10th sign of the Eastern zodiac?”

Righteousness: “Please don’t put it like that. ...And I can cut through them because Houjou would sometimes send in things like that to harass us, so I’m used to it. They were small enough that foot soldiers could deal with them, but they all loved giant breasts, so they always went after my sister and left me alone. That let me practice slicing through them all I wanted.”

Saying that made her sad, but she chose to believe that was due to remembering her sister. *Oh, but now that I think about it, I’m pretty sure they attacked Yoshiyori too. I wonder why.*

There was a trick to cutting them. After the blade touched them, you had to push instead of pulling back to slice. That would allow the blade to dig into the thick skin and the blade could directly touch them while ignoring the slime or

whatever. Just keep pushing from there and they were cut.

She proved it with her actions.

After bisecting two more, she slammed into them with all of Righteousness's strength to blow them away. And she spoke while watching the result.

"The Mogami group has returned. You just need me to secure this area, right?"

Behind her, Fukushima heard the metallic sounds and spraying water as Kiyomasa began her defense outside.

Fukushima was currently traveling down a white corridor. It was the central corridor of Novgorod's white stone city hall.

The non-glowing *lernen figur* she opened in front of her face showed her it led to the main hall and to the passageway leading underground.

The world's very first academy was said to exist below Novgorod.

She had heard that Holland Chancellor Prince of Orange had gone there. He had bizarrely gone alone with no bodyguards whatsoever, but there was a dangerous rumor surrounding his actions.

He supposedly wanted to meet with Musashi and to tell them the secrets of P.A. Oda's Genesis Project.

And Fukushima had been sent here concerning that. Taking out the Prince of Orange was only natural for someone belonging to M.H.R.R., but things were different when the Genesis Project was on the line.

She had been instructed to punish the Prince of Orange and to destroy Novgorod's underground structure.

She knew about the Genesis Project. Almost all of P.A. Oda's leadership and commanders did.

As did all of the Ten Spears. They all knew. And...

"It must be carried out without compromise, so I must eliminate any possible obstacle!"

So she would strike at anyone who announced their intent to interfere. And she would destroy the location that allowed that negotiation to take place.

It was simple.

But someone else was trying to interfere with that simplicity.

“Do thou intend to get in my way, former Sviet Rus Vice Chancellor Marfa Boretskaya-sama!?”

“To be honest, I don’t. I only want to face Kagekatsu.”

The voice came from the center of the circular hall. The dark figure wielded a sword.

She spread her arms to protect the large door in the wall behind her and her mouth split left and right in a smile.

“Ha ha. But it wouldn’t be fair if I only let you through. ...Every last mayor of Novgorod has searched through these depths and vaguely realized the truth. I’m only the most recent one to do so. But...”

But...

“Those past mayors’ guesses were most likely correct! ...What happened surrounding the Anti-Denial Pro-Tuning Project during the Age of Dawn? It was probably ‘happiness’. It was probably ‘salvation’. It was probably ‘hypocrisy’. No...”

“What do thou mean, no!?”

Fukushima shouted back as she charged into the hall and Marfa answered her.

“It was all an undeniable ‘deadly sin’!!”

A moment later, Fukushima saw something.

In the darkness, the starlight entered through a skylight and the flames and other outdoor lights shined in.

“It’s time you felt the restriction of Sviet Rus’s former Vice Chancellor, the Vedma.”

A tiger appeared in the entire space behind Marfa.

As Fukushima ran head on, it looked like wings.

But it was not.

“...Arms!?”

“As the main line of the demon race, I have inherited the ability to summon the arms of my family’s bodyguards. I have the arms and techniques of those who wished to protect us even in death.”

There were more than 1000 of them. And they were all one of two colors.

“Those that wished to be preserved after death turned yellow from the change to their bodily fluids. Those that wished to be modified turned black as their blood congealed. When they are lined up in this pattern, my ancestors called it the Tiger Wings, but I prefer another name: Kagetora, the Shadow Tiger.”

In the darkness, the demon arms all held weapons or were unarmed.

“Pierce her.”

Four digits’ worth of slashes and blows collided with Fukushima as a tiger’s roar.

Marfa watched the tiger attack she had sent out.

The floor was shattered, the walls were torn apart, and beyond the 1000+ arms that she slowly pulled back...

“Oh?”

Fukushima was still standing. Her hair swayed behind her and her clothes had been torn, armor and all, but...

“Can you use your acceleration technique to pull off the ideal movement?”

“I am still unexperienced, so it is only a crude attempt.”

I see, thought Marfa. Experts would control their own speed in battle to make the ideal movements, but there was more than one way to do so. Some used

martial arts and others made miniscule movements linked to their sense of sight or hearing.

To put it another way, no special technique was needed. If someone focused on their own movements and truly mastered them, they would eventually reach that level. But...

“You must have had quite an excellent teacher. It is rare indeed for a human at your age to pull off even a crude first step toward the ideal.”

“...My teacher is no longer with me.”

“Is that so?”

It was unclear if that was due to death or a simple parting of ways, but Marfa had no intention of asking for clarification. Instead...

“Were you loved?”

“Enough to be fine as long as I have my comrades.”

“Testament,” replied Marfa to wish peace on that soul. Then bluish-white flames left the corner of her mouth. For an undead demon, bringing peace to a soul would burn their own body. *When you’re too powerful, just a slight word qualifies as purification, so it can be a problem at times,* thought Marfa with a small smile. And...

“Then I’ll go with this.”

Marfa activated attack spells with all 1000+ arms of Kagetora.

She used wide-range, straight-line, projectile, and permeating spells all at once to leave no ideal move to take.

“This unavoidable attack is known as Kagetora Roar. ...Ohh, and now I’m laughing at the name I gave it as a joke.”

It scored a direct hit.

Marfa saw it happen.

Immense power was slammed into a single enemy in the form of flapping wings. It was extremely large even for the Kagetora technique.

But Fukushima moved at the center of it all. She simply held her weapon's flat spear tip forward, and...

"Fall, Ichinotani!"

With those words, the spear tip opened. It almost looked like a T-shaped rake or a dragonfly, but...

...The power is vanishing?

The spell disappeared as it collided with Fukushima's opened spear tip. But it was not erased. The heat, the cold, the gravity, the light, and everything else were...

"Stored!?"

"Testament. This is the power of the defensive divine weapon named Ichinotani!"

The power was devoured and torn apart. Beyond it, Fukushima was nearly blown away by the portion of the power that escaped to the sides or above.

But she narrowed her eyes and spoke two words:

"Headfirst Fall!!"

Kagetora grew beyond a simple impact and peaked as something more like an explosion, but Fukushima accelerated toward Marfa. This was more than just taking one step at a time. That girl could make the ideal movements, so she made definite progress that built up a smooth momentum in a straight line.

"...Fall!!"

She fell forward.

So Marfa also moved. She had Kagetora flap and gather together.

"I see...!" The corners of her mouth rose in a smile. She raised her blade on the right to intercept the girl.

"It's just as the Prince of Orange said! So this is one of the new era's commanders! I can see why Toby is so fixated on you!!"

Immediately, all of Kagetora's power exploded and the two blades clashed.

Fukushima realized in an instant that the world had fallen from light to darkness.

Kagetora's explosion had ended and darkness had returned to the city hall.

She stood on the right side of the wall behind Marfa. She was crouched down on the wall's surface storing up her strength for a leap.

The main hall was filled with heat and dense wind.

And Marfa turned back toward her.

There was a black line running from the center of her chest to her left collarbone. It had been torn, not cut. That was the mark from Ichinotani's closed tip piercing her diagonally.

A normal human would have released a spray of blood and died from shock after their blood pressure plummeted.

But Marfa was different. She was not bleeding; she merely looked down at the black wound, and...

"The weak point of the dead is their 'soul corpse'. It exists at the center of the body, so strike here, in the center of my chest. Destroy this and my soul's mold will disappear."

Of course...

"The dead won't let you do that so easily."

Fukushima nodded and dropped down with Headfirst Fall. She was targeting the point Marfa indicated.

Fukushima thought that anyone who was obedient to battle would respond to an enemy's request to target them. Especially when their life was hanging in the balance.

After all...

...The battlefield is where hopes are fulfilled.

When the battle ended, the victor's hope would of course be fulfilled. So Fukushima wanted the battlefield to be a pure place. She wanted it to be a

place that held nothing more than everyone's hopes.

The air here had been scorched and frozen and the area was filled with ether wind, but it was being washed clean by a great power.

"Toh."

By the time her feet landed, she was half a step closer.

She wanted to take two more steps and move to the best of her ability in order to fulfill hers and her opponent's hopes, but her speed rejected that. The moment was pure, so her speed told her to hurry up and end it.

And so she took another step and directed an attack toward Marfa that slipped past even the wind resistance.

But at that very moment.

"Sorry."

A voice reached her from the side and her pure attack was deflected with a metallic clang.

Marfa looked to the person standing in front of her.

It was a higher demon man wearing a black-dyed Sviet Rus uniform.

He had intervened in Fukushima's speed and deflected her spear tip with his staff. He was...

"Kagekatsu...!"

"Sorry."

He repeated that word, but his apology was not directed at Marfa.

He was speaking to Fukushima who had tried to attack her.

"Leave this place to me, human."

Fukushima hesitated.

Interfering in someone's battle was rude, but she could not let her emotions

get the better of her. However...

...Is this Sviet Rus Chancellor and Student Council President Uesugi Kagekatsu-sama!?

Her heart longed to battle him. Sviet Rus was P.A. Oda's enemy at the moment. It would be perfectly possible to battle him and this might be her only chance to do so. But...

"Do thou desire this place?"

"Testament. ...I made an appointment earlier. I arrived a little late, though."

That meant she was the one intruding. This was where Kagekatsu and Marfa were meant to face each other. To keep that battlefield pure, she had to leave.

...Then I will leave this place to Kagekatsu-sama.

But just as she thought that, someone carrying a spear passed by from the left.

It was Musashi Vice Chancellor Honda Futayo. She briefly glanced Fukushima's way with an "oh?", but then kept running.

"Do these stairs lead to the underground ruins of the Whatever-It-Was-Called Academy?"

"Testament," confirmed Marfa. "So you're the first to arrive."

Hearing that, the Musashi Vice Chancellor tilted her head but then smiled.

"I'm the first to arrive!?"

Fukushima watched as the girl raised her spear and ran to the back of the hall.

"...Ah."

And she frantically ran after the girl.

At the same time, a group of noise and people ran into the hall.

Fukushima did not even bother looking back. It was the Musashi group.

She pursued the Musashi Vice Chancellor and descended into the emptiness belowground.

Just as she did, she heard a voice. At the head of the group, the Musashi

Chancellor spoke up the instant he set foot in the hall.

“Ohh! Kagekatsu! You’re looking pretty cool there!”

Kagekatsu grew bashful when he heard the Musashi Chancellor.

...C-cool? You’re gonna make me blush, Aoi-kun!

But he had only made it in time because they had created a diversion. Saitou’s assault unit and the Musashi group had continued their invasion even after the supply line of additional troops had been cut off, and that had allowed for what came next:

“Heh. Sviet Rus’s main force is arriving in the city of Novgorod along the northern cliff route!”

Horizon, Masazumi, and Asama left the Musashi and used the northern route to reach the city. By the time they met up with Toori’s group, Novgorod was divided in two.

The dividing line ran diagonally from the north end to the east end. The northern city hall was on the northwest end and the line cut southeast from there.

P.A. Oda had more overall area in their bottom division, but Sviet Rus and Musashi’s top division was denser.

Just inside the city gate on the south end, Fuwa recalculated the transition of forces now that Sviet Rus’s main unit had scaled the cliff from the northern port. She had P.A. Oda’s forces gather to the north, and...

“Shibata! We can secure the city hall from the south to the west!”

“Shaja! ...This is our final job! If you can still move, get fighting until we receive the signal from Fukushima or Kiyomasa of the Ten Spears!”

On Katsuie’s barked order, the highly mobile members of Shibata forces and the skeleton warriors gathered to the north.

Meanwhile, O’Malley of the Trumps had been gathering the attention of

about 1/4 of Shibata's fleet as a diversion in the southern sky, but now Shibata's fleet turned to the south and prepared to withdraw. Then they continuously fired their rear cannons over Novgorod and toward Sviet Rus. The Jurakudai continued to float in the west and it kept a defense barrier up at the midpoint even as it spewed smoke. That prevented Sviet Rus's fleet from invading Novgorod from the sky as well.

On Novgorod's surface and in the sky above, everything was holding both sides in check, but...

"Things must be different underground," commented Naruze as she fired on the ship in the southern sky.

And she was right. In the space below Novgorod's city hall, the clash between the cooperative Sviet Rus and Musashi unit and Shibata's forces was only intensifying.

The battle over the Divinely Ordained Prayer Academy below Novgorod had entered its final stage.

Chapter 92: She who Surpasses Her Position

第九十二章

『立場の超越者』

それはビジュアルよりも
鮮やかに明確に見える
未来の行き先
配点 (進路)



More than a visual

It is the vividly and clearly seen

Destination of the future

Point Allocation (Plans)

Futayo saw a small light in the darkness.

She was descending into a vast emptiness below Novgorod's city hall.

The wind seemed to blow in from below and the distant light gradually grew.

"Is that...?"

It was a great hall. The circular stone hall was 200 meters across, but the center had a slope covered in stairs, allowing one to descend further.

The hall was lit, so someone must have arrived here before her. And...

"Welcome, those of you journeying to the depths of the world."

A man's voice rang out. It was amplified with a spell and it reverberated so much it was a little hard to make out.

"I am the Prince of Orange, Holland's 'Resisting Chancellor'. That isn't my actual name, but I will omit why that is. I am currently in the 'classroom' below the entrance hall."

Now, then.

"I would like for you to reach me here. I have something to show you. What can you see in the depths of the world, in the abyss leading ever deeper? My teacher was Matsudaira Motonobu," he said. "And this unworthy student will teach you that you can find here exactly what he said you could."

A quiet laugh entered the city hall's central hall.

It was from Marfa who was supported by Kagekatsu in the center of the hall.

The hall was under attack from Shibata's forces from the central corridors on the west and south. Sviet Rus's demon warriors had created a wall of ice with a

spell and were firing with rifles and spells.

They were so focused on defending by the corridors that the center of the hall was nearly empty. As the gunfire reverberated, Marfa spoke quietly.

“This was my first time letting someone underneath here. None of the other mayors ever did either. ...But Novgorod is meant to welcome ‘guests’. The previous mayor’s records say that someone would occasionally show up as a ‘guest’, hoping to view the investigation records left by the historical mayors.”

“Was that Matsudaira Motonobu?”

“Most likely,” confirmed Marfa. “The previous mayor wished to know the truth and identity of the ruins below here. Of course, he was also a disciplined member of Sviet Rus and he was the first to volunteer to become a warrior during the purge in my generation. He said it was all to protect Novgorod.”

Marfa continued.

“Yes, former mayor. We have a chance of fulfilling your hopes now. ...Because you protected this place using the tool known as death, we were given enough time for some others to possibly arrive at the truth.”

“Allow me to speak of older times.”

As the Prince of Orange’s voice reverberated around them, Mitotsudaira took the lead down the large hole descending underground. Futayo and Fukushima had already gone down, so the silver wolf hurried after them.

Her king was wrapped in a silver chain behind her and they were followed by the 1st Special Duty Officer, Mary, and...

“Horizon!”

Asama and Masazumi were with them too. Sviet Rus’s primary forces had protected those 3 girls and allowed them to arrive from the north. Horizon was seated on a silver chain that supported her back like a chair, but the other 2 silver chains were broken and could not carry Asama and Masazumi.

“I’ll take care of them. ...Can you trust me?”

Unturning Centipede ran after them without making a single audible footstep. Mitotsudaira nodded back at Date Narumi who had Urquiaga with her.

“Judge!”

But she was not the only one to respond. Horizon and Asama also agreed despite never having met the girl and Narumi picked up the 2 girls while nodding back.

Shortly thereafter, the stairway came to an end and they reached a landing.

The proper route was the staircase spiraling around the inside wall of the large hole, but...

...*Oh?*

Mitotsudaira noticed a portion of the landing’s railing was bent and cut away. It had long since corroded and rusted, but...

Novice: “This means the ancient people also had some people as stupid as all of you. For some reason, crazy people always feel the need to climb up or jump down when they see an elevated place.”

Silver Wolf: “Wh-what’s wrong with that!? It feels nice!”

With that said, she pulled in her silver chains and held Horizon and her king as they sat on her shoulders.

“My king, when did you start crossdressing again?”

“Oh, c’mon, Nate. Being carried by a knight is a princess’s job. I’ll be a royal court girl from now on!”

“Mitotsudaira-sama, I am the real princess. Please throw out the faker.”

What am I supposed to do about this? she wondered as the stairs came to an end. After glancing back at those following her...

“I will be going on ahead.”

She jumped into the abyss. She heard a voice as she felt a sense of floating in her freefall.

“It happened around 30 years ago. In a certain place, we were researching a solution to the Apocalypse.”

The voice came from down below, but she also heard...

...Clashing metal?

“The greatest minds of every nation went into hiding and gathered together for 2 years. Lord Motonobu visited each of us individually and invited us like this: ‘Let’s form a new Testament Cross-Borders Unit.’ It was such a childish dream.”

The voice continued as sharp metallic noises rang out.

It was Futayo. She was fighting in the hall below.

“And to save the world from the Apocalypse, we came to know a certain individual.”

That was...

“We referred to that friend as...the Princess.”

Fukushima battled Futayo.

She had no time. She knew that all too well. After all, she was not stopping the Prince of Orange from saying anything unnecessary and the rest of Musashi’s group was falling from above.

If she could intercept Musashi’s group with an anti-air attack, her worries about the future would probably vanish. But Musashi Vice Chancellor Honda Futayo did not give her time for that.

...She is very different from the other day!

Her top speed was not that different, but she no longer crumbled at low speeds.

Her acceleration spell was a cumulative purification one. So any disturbance in the acceleration direction would cause the spell to misfire and send her flying.

But that did not happen. She appeared to move frantically, she would move on unsteady legs, she would swing her arms around, she would whip her string-bound hair behind her, and it all looked disturbed despite how gentle it was.

“...!”

But she contained it all inside herself and unified it.

As her body was nearly blown away, she seemed to be holding it back, restraining it, soothing it, and containing the overflowing power within while allowing it to flow elsewhere undiminished.

...This is...

Fukushima felt it was like the wind. It blew wildly and roughly, but it never scattered and it would continue blowing wherever it pleased even when one held their hand up to stop it.

Just when Fukushima thought the girl was going to circle behind her, Futayo would pass by her, collide with her, pass through, or approach as if entangling the two of them.

When she seemed heavy and slow enough to touch, she was fast. But when she seemed light and quick, she actually grew heavy.

This was nothing like before.

She had moved like a person before. Where had she learned to express the wind instead? Fukushima could make a guess, but...

“Testament...!”

She had to focus only on her desire to battle this opponent and on her hope to defeat her.

The battlefield was where hopes were fulfilled. So...

“Headfirst Fall...!”

Fukushima threw herself into a fall as if to circle around the wind.

Narumi was the one to increase the speed of her descent. She sent power to Unturning Centipede’s back wings and began a power dive along with Urquiaga. She was supporting Musashi’s shrine maiden and Vice President, so she had to worry about the opening created in the moment of landing.

“I will cover for you!” announced Urquiaga. “Let’s head down at full power!”

Asama: “Eh!? Ah, wait, um!!”

Vice President: “If this is enough to scare Asama, I might not be able to handle it!!”

Tsukinowa: “Maa.”

Should we really do this? wondered Narumi as she flew straight down. The faster they got to the bottom, the sooner they could hold off Fukushima Masanori. So she did not hesitate to take the shortest route down. But...

“Would you look at that...”

Narumi noticed something about the battle far down below.

She did not know much about Musashi’s Vice Chancellor or Fukushima Masanori of the Ten Spears, but something stood out about their exchange of offense and defense.

Asama: “They seem to fit together really well...”

Narumi agreed. It probably helped that they had both mastered similar techniques and were both wielding spears. And they had also fought once before, so they both knew what the other could do. But...

...It’s pretty.

Their evasions and attacks were different actions, but they fit together so well.

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor would spin and circle around her opponent with light steps.

She generally swung her spear up from below and spun it around, so if her opponent moved to her right or left, she too could place herself beyond her spear and the spear’s rotation would turn her around.

She moved in circles. Her body was disturbed and had an unsteadiness that threatened to send her flying at any moment, but she just barely bore with it and kept moving. To make the ideal movements, she moved gently but kept her entire body spinning in a certain direction to shift her body weight. And occasionally...

“————”

She would pass through in a pure straight line.

So this is Musashi's Vice Chancellor, thought Narumi. She was still unsteady, her movements showed great room for improvement, and she would suddenly shift between fast and slow. And...

...As for Fukushima...

She made constant changes between fast and slow. By limiting the effective range of her falling acceleration spell named Headfirst Fall, she could use it for short distances or long distances. It could be a single step at the shortest and several meters at the longest. During it all, she would spin her body around, take somewhat heavy steps, and yet always accelerate.

She continually kicked off the floor and launched herself forward in a pose that looked like she was sitting in the air. She attacked with horizontal sweeps or spinning her body to make a jab.

Their movements were different, but they fit together well.

Sudden shifts between fast and slow versus constant changes between fast and slow.

Maintaining speed versus repeatedly accelerating.

Martial arts meant to preserve speed versus martial arts meant to continue accelerating.

Vertical attacks versus spinning attacks.

All of those came together, they rotated around as if entangling their feet together, they jumped or ducked, and they moved out or circled in.

...It's almost like they're sparring.

Was I like that with Masamune? Narumi thought she had seen something like this back when the main garden's cherry trees had green leaves and were still shedding their flowers. And...

“There are flowers here too...”

They were sparks. As the two combatants sped up, they came into contact in

more places.

Narumi and the others would land in a few more moments. She kind of wanted them to continue a while longer, but...

...Yes.

She figured that girls as skilled as these would settle this by the time she landed, so she poured further acceleration into the wings on her back.

A moment later, the number of scattering flowers grew below her.

The battle between Musashi's Vice Chancellor and Fukushima had begun to fit together perfectly.

The two girls had chosen to move clockwise.

Futayo pursued while Fukushima fell back. They ran in a circle measuring 5 meters across.

And their attacks constantly clashed inside that circle.

After a few exchanges, Futayo held Tonbo Spare below her right arm and targeted Fukushima's chest from her lower right. Fukushima responded by sweeping her spear horizontally from her right to her upper left.

Sparks flew as Tonbo Spare was swept away. And as Futayo rotated her weapon back, Fukushima placed the horizontally sweeping Ichinotani below her right arm and spun her entire body to the left.

With Ichinotani below her right arm, Fukushima pushed and spun it to the right with her right hip so that the bottom end would sweep out and strike Futayo.

Futayo responded by ducking below Tonbo Spare as it spun vertically to her right. She placed the rotating Tonbo Spare on her left and caught Ichinotani's shaft on the center of the rotation.

Fukushima had made a wide swing of the bottom of her spear and Futayo did not fight it when she caught it on her weapon.

Her feet left the floor a little, but she slowly spun Tonbo Spare as sparks flew, and...

“————”

She let Fukushima's weapon push her in a circle around the girl.

After it pushed her and finally released her, Futayo twisted her body and placed Tonbo Spare on her right.

Meanwhile, Fukushima pushed the bottom of her spear with her hip and turned her body toward Futayo. Fukushima had no weapon in front of her, so Futayo swung up her spear tip to slice through the girl's crotch from below.

Fukushima accelerated her body. But she was not trying to move away. By falling over the extremely short distance toward the spinning spear bottom, the left side of her back was pulled back and she turned her right side toward Futayo.

With Fukushima turned to the side, Tonbo Spare's shaft shot up just in front of her body, grazing her breasts and nose, but it did not actually hit her. Instead, she moved her spear forward while still holding it under her right arm. She swung it up to strike Futayo's now undefended body.

Just as Futayo's rising spear tip pointed diagonally upwards, she lifted her feet from the floor.

She used the upwards swing of the spear to pull herself upwards and somewhat dangled from it in order to turn her right side forward. She kept her toes just barely on the floor throughout, but Fukushima's spear tip raced past the front of her slightly shifted body.

And once Futayo returned Tonbo Spare to her right, they both faced each other at close range with their spears held outwards.

“...”

They clashed. They slammed their left shoulders together and spun around on that point.

They both tilted their bodies to the left and pushed at the other's shoulder while making feints disguised as attacks and using accelerated footwork to spin

in a circle once, twice, and then thrice. And...

“— — — —”

They simultaneously pushed back the other's shoulder and jumped back themselves before simultaneously sending the spear held under their right arm at the other.

They both turned their left side forward at the same time and grabbed at the enemy's spear.

“...Oh!”

They forcibly spun their bodies to the left, turning their right side toward their enemy this time. They used their entire body to pull the other girl's spear to the left, stole it, and raised it before swinging their left arm like a whip to send a high-speed horizontal sweep of their enemy's spear from the left.

They both immediately moved forward. They approached their enemy beyond the center of their enemy's horizontal sweep and caught the shaft on their waist.

This was not a hit.

The principle of leverage meant the blow was weaker when they moved further in than the fulcrum point. This put a greater burden on the one supplying the leverage, so their opponent's hand was knocked from the spear shaft. Now that the two spears were free again and they had both built up their momentum, the circled past their enemy's waist and around to their back.

They both grabbed the spear tip passing by there. And they reversed their wrist to make an attack, Futayo from the lower left and Fukushima from the upper left.

The two diagonal paths grazed past each other and the two girls caught them by moving forward. Fukushima supported hers below her right arm and Futayo supported hers on her right shoulder.

And from the shoulder and side, the spears spun around to their backs and then diagonally to the other side and shoulder.

They both grabbed the rotating bottom of the spear. And this time...

“...!!”

Futayo attacked from the lower right and Fukushima from the upper right.

They did not stop.

The two spears passed back and forth, circled around their bodies, and changed direction entirely when they moved their hands. The two girls continued a literal exchange of weapons as they spun around.

The ideal acceleration and the ideal falling brought them through a high-speed series of spear strikes while within arm's reach of each other.

“Ohh...!!”

Their toes collided. They had nowhere else to go, but their acceleration spells did not break.

Fukushima activated Headfirst Fall to rotate herself and Futayo opened her mouth to sing.

“And.”

She used a phrase she liked. For this technique, she would determine the axis line of her feet and then shift that line slightly to continue her acceleration. She repeated the same phrase again and again, but then she suddenly changed the words.

“Waver.”

Fukushima's expression changed when she heard the song.

“Is that...?”

Fukushima's eyebrows rose, but...

“Is that how thou expresses thyself...!?”

The corners of her mouth rose and she looked on the verge of laughter. But there was no mockery there. She immediately clenched her back teeth, wrinkled her brow, and seemed unable to contain herself.

“What comes next...!?”

“Never ceasing.”

Futayo slowly spoke. She spun her body and rotated the bottom of her spear around from her back to her right side.

“Always.”

She sped up.

“Toward your destination.”

Futayo approached Fukushima. She did not approach from the front. She accelerated her rotation and quickly moved in from the side.

Fukushima gasped when she saw Futayo almost seeming to descend toward her from the left.

She was currently using Headfirst Fall right up to the limits of what she could control. How could the enemy produce enough speed to easily ignore that?

No, she understood the logic behind it. And she understood why the girl was able to draw out that logic.

It was the song. It was probably a song she had been given to maintain her timing when she had learned this speed technique. It acted as a trigger and allowed her to use this high speed technique.

This gave her even greater speed than before.

“Are you honing your axis of movement!?”

Asama: “Kimi, can you hear Futayo singing!?”

“I can.” Kimi smiled bitterly on the academy bridge. “It’s a bit of a problem that she can’t sing without getting worked up first, though. But I’m stealing a look at your display of Futayo’s ether output and it looks stable enough. She’ll be fine.”

“What’s the trick to this?” asked Neshinbara as he stood on the stairs. “I highly doubt her previous acceleration spell suddenly got faster. If we learn the trick to this, I think we could strengthen all of our fighters”

“That wouldn’t work. You need skill on my or Futayo’s level and you need the

earnestness of a 'specialist'. After all..."

Kimi spun around while looking up at the exchange of cannon fire in the sky.

She used the toe of her shoe to make a perfect horizontal rotation without wobbling in the slightest.

"Do you get it now?"

"No, not at all."

"You're so useless." Kimi placed both feet back on the bridge and shrugged. "Before, Futayo would kick off the ground with the bottom of her feet or her toes, but her body learned something in our training today: to move her body, she only needs to alter her axis of movement. And..."

And...

"The smaller and sharper that axis of movement, the more of the power she gives it will be used."

"You mean it won't just disperse?"

"No." Kimi spun her hair around. "Life can be broken down to a single cell. And an axis of movement is just as simple. But as it grows, it grows wasteful, gains various ways of expressing itself, and loses that simplicity. So it isn't that she's keeping her power from dispersing. She's returning it to its simplest form. And to do that..."

She kept a light rhythm with her feet and she repeated the same phrase again and again.

"You take a pulse-like rhythm, convert it into words, and make those your own Words. It moves gently and never stops. I would say we all know it from before we were born, but I'm not sure about that. Still, it is familiar to us all. It is a phrase from when we were little and would trip far too easily. From when we were held and rocked. If you can remember that, regaining a simple axis of movement is easy. I mean...compared to standing up for the first time in your life, this is the easiest thing in the world."

Futayo caught up to Fukushima and asked her a question.

“Are you a coward!?”

She received no clear answer, but Fukushima’s expression did change. Her eyebrows briefly shot up and her eyes widened, but a moment later she was smiling with her eyebrows raised.

That was all the answer Futayo needed, so she moved forward and briefly leaned back.

“Perfect!!”

She hit Fukushima with a headbutt.

Their hair shook and their bodies shook. And they sent out the spear bottoms they had held at their hips. But while Fukushima targeted the center of Futayo’s body, Futayo set her sights on something else: the bottom of Ichinotani thrusting toward her.

The two spears collided, sparks flew, and both girls’ bodies shook further. But...

“And.”

Futayo stepped forward as if twisting her toes on the floor.

“Never ceasing.”

She used her toes to suppress the shaking of her body.

“Always.”

She made quick adjustments from her toes to her ankles, knees, thighs, hips, gut, back, shoulders, and arms.

“Toward your destination.”

Her rotating spear tip struck Fukushima. It was a direct hit, but it hit the shaft of Ichinotani that Fukushima had lifted back up as if embracing it. However, Fukushima had already lost her balance, so she failed to control her Headfirst Fall acceleration spell.

“Kh...!”

A noise rang out. It was the sound of Headfirst Fall’s spell circle shattering.

The light burst and her entire body flew.

She was thrown through the air by her out-of-control acceleration.

Fukushima controlled herself in midair.

She used her martial arts and physical strength to pull back her twisting and spinning body and she aimed her feet toward the floor.

“Kh.”

She ended up landing on her knees.

She slid backwards across the stone floor and her hair followed her as it was pulled in toward her. Beyond it, she saw her enemy gently rotating her body. She was 50 meters away. New enemies had finished descending and landed behind her. And...

...The entrance leading further down is behind me!

Fukushima knew it all came down to this, so she pulled her arms back.

She opened Ichinotani’s tip and held it at the ready.

Ichinotani had two different abilities.

The first was to absorb an approaching attack inside the opened tip to neutralize it.

And the second was to...

...Fire the absorbed power from the opened tip!

So she raised her voice in her intent to settle this here.

“Fall...Ichinotani!”

After descending under Narumi’s power and yet landing softly, Asama looked forward.

It happened in just an instant.

Futayo was standing near their landing point, but then she disappeared.

...Eh?

Asama looked further forward.

Futayo was there. She had leaped 50 meters in an instant. She charged in before Fukushima's spear could finish opening its firing system.

"Ah."

And in no time, a metallic crash shook the air.

Fukushima flew through the entrance behind her and slammed into the wall beyond.

The tip of Futayo's Tonbo Spare had stabbed into the opened tip of Fukushima's spear and prevented it from firing.

But Asama recognized the way Futayo had moved.

...That was...

Futayo had used it after falling from the scaffolding and into empty air at the end of her training with Kimi. After falling, she had just barely managed to plant her feet on the vertical scaffolding but could not stop her fall. She had then subconsciously done this.

She had focused her body's axis of movement on just her toe tip and thrown all of her acceleration into that.

"That must be how the Hassou Tobi works..."

But in Futayo's case, her acceleration was much sharper. Her course was nearly a straight line and her speed was high. She had shot forward too quickly for her enemy's projectile.

"It really is like soaring wings."

Unable to rid herself of her momentum, Futayo spun around and landed. And the instant she stood back up, Fukushima raised her voice from where she had collided with the opposite wall.

"Oh...!"

As if peeling herself from the wall, she landed and tried to attack Futayo.

Her spear was already opened, so this spear jab would include cannon fire.

But Asama saw that Futayo was already moving.

She held Tonbo Spare vertically. And that meant...

...Is she using it!?

Asama's question was answered by Futayo's voice. It was far clearer and calmer than expected.

"Bind...Tonbo Spare!"

Futayo did not hesitate.

She knew all too well that Tonbo Spare had yet to activate even once.

She had only just made a great leap with Soaring Wings and she could not correct her posture in time to use it again.

So as she landed, she reflected her enemy in Tonbo Spare's blade and raised the spear. Tonbo Spare's internal processing speed was slower than Soaring Wings's acceleration, but she had decided that would not matter if she prepared it in advance.

...Will this work?

Her hands did not feel it activating.

Perhaps because she was so focused, time seemed to pass excruciatingly slowly.

If it did not activate, she would lose. So her heart felt a temptation to jump away with Soaring Wings. But...

"————"

She chose not to trust her hesitation.

Instead, she chose to stop holding any doubts in Tonbo Spare. Because she was absolutely certain that Tonbo Spare would not "activate".

It was not something that "activated".

Tonbokiri had not been either.

The divine weapon left with the Honda family possessed great power, so it decided for itself who was a worthy master.

So, she thought.

...The will of this weapon of war would never choose a master who doubts it.

So she told herself that this was not a Tonbo Spare she held.

It was power.

That power had been left in her care. It was the same as her arms and legs.

She knew what she had to do to produce the results she wanted.

Words were needed to activate it, but what came next was not done by Tonbokiri or Tonbo Spare. She herself had to draw out the power left in her care.

That power would move once it was released.

Move, Tonbo Spare. Move, my power. It was like reaching out a hand or moving a leg forward.

She had a single goal. Her father had left that goal with her as a member of the Honda family.

“I must simply win!”

A moment later, a dragonfly-shaped sign frame appeared around Tonbo Spare’s spear tip.

It had already locked onto the person reflected in the blade.

“Understood,” it said.

The locking sign frame shattered. And...

“...!”

Fukushima reflexively raised her spear for defense, but it was too late.

The spear’s shaft was split diagonally and the weakened power struck her.

The cutting power was even weaker than Tonbo Spare and shattered easily

for a blade, but the diagonal strike hit Fukushima and once more slammed her against the wall behind her.

The power hit a 30 meter section of the wall and Fukushima was caught in the aftermath.

“You have my thanks!”

Futayo bowed and turned her back as the wall collapsed.

A quick thought occurred to Futayo.

It came to her through the activation of Tonbo Spare.

.../...

If she would flinch in the face of a name inheritor’s resolve, she only had to give herself that same task. She knew someone who had taken up a far higher position and became a more formidable foe than any other name inheritor: Honda Tadakatsu.

If she set that name as her goal...

...What would my father have thought?

When she faced forward, she saw everyone there: Masazumi, the princess, and the idiot too, but the idiot raised his hand.

“Hey, looks like you’ve finally got your groove back. That’s a real help.”

“Judge. I was a bit of a burden, wasn’t I? I look forward to being more useful in the future.”

She had recovered enough to say that, but the idiot smiled bitterly. He gave a thumbs up while standing next to the princess.

“We were right to take you in at Mikawa. I heard from Seijun that you’d have gone to Aki otherwise.”

“Judge. That was my intention as commander of the guard unit.”

Saying that reminded Futayo of something.

What had her father said at Mikawa?

...He told me to do whatever I wanted once I arrived in Aki.

She could not arrive in Aki now. Itsukushima had fallen. But she had arrived at Musashi.

“ ... ”

In her heart, she bowed to her father and Kazuno and gave herself a command.

...Do whatever you wish.

And so she spoke.

“From now on...I think I will work toward inheriting the name of Honda Tadakatsu.”

Masazumi heard the idiot say, “I see.”

I see, she thought herself as Futayo moved alongside Horizon.

Inheriting the name of Honda Tadakatsu would probably take a lot of effort, but she was probably prepared for that. If that meant Futayo was looking to the future, that was enough for Masazumi.

Her classmate had found a plan for the future. Sensing expectation, joy, and loneliness in the girl, Masazumi recalled Futayo’s attack and asked about it.

“Was that a cutting power?”

“No, instead of cutting, it more broke it with an impact... You could call it a splitting power.”

“So it’s missing the last part?” asked Mary with a smile. “Just like ‘Tonbokiri’ becomes ‘Tonbo’ Spare, you removed the end of ‘cutting’ or ‘katsudan’ to get ‘splitting’ or ‘katsuda’. And that Far Eastern wordplay might also work as a good luck charm, since ‘katsu da’ means ‘it is victory’.”

“That’s right.” Masazumi nodded and opened her mouth. “And if it’s a splitting power-...”

For some reason the others stopped her.

“Calm down, Masazumi. There are no enemies around right now!”

“That’s right, Masazumi-dono! You should save that until we’re surrounded!”

“But I have determined she might need to periodically make small puns to let off the pressure. Otherwise the pressure might build up until a devastating one is released without warning.”

“Stop making things up about me!”

Asama looked the other way and started viewing some kind of frequency graph with Hanami, but Masazumi decided to ignore that. At any rate, that was when a voice reached her ears. It was the Prince of Orange’s low voice.

“Now, come to me. ...Everything is here.”

“The battle underground is complete. The only question now is what the Musashi group will see down there.”

Shibata’s forces continued their assault on the main hall and Sviet Rus’s warriors held them off with barricades and counterattacks. As Kagekatsu supported Marfa, she asked him a question.

“How about we settle things between us now, Kagekatsu?”

“What do you plan to do, Marfa?”

Despite saying that, he stopped supporting her. That likely meant he was prepared to do this, so she announced his crimes.

“Not only did you have me inherit the name of Kagekatsu...but at the time you needed the Testament Union’s help to fight back against P.A. Oda, so you were forced to faithfully carry out the history recreation. That is why you simultaneously recreated the purge of Novgorod and the purge of the Kagekatsu faction that lost the Siege of Otate fought over who would succeed the Uesugi clan. Do you have any idea how many precious subordinates and friends I lost?”

“Your subordinates and friends were my subordinates and friends as well.”

“Then,” said Marfa. “Do you have any idea how much wrath there is in my heart?”

“...I do.”

“Then,” repeated Marfa.

And she pulled a weapon from her back.

“This is Maska Orge. ...Do you know what that means?”

“Testament,” confirmed Kagekatsu. He placed his staff in front of him and both hands on top of that.

There was no hint of resistance in his action, so Marfa raised Maska Orge and aimed it at him.

Saitou looked back while commanding the interception unit. His eyebrows rose.

“Kagekatsu! You must not do this!”

“It is fine. There is nothing to fear. After all...”

He looked Marfa right in the eye.

“Marfa... You will not shoot.”

“Nonsense. ...None of your conceited words can change the way I feel at this point.”

“But you will not shoot, Marfa. That is certain. To shoot would be an insult to your subordinates and friends...to my subordinates and friends who laid down their lives for you when you accepted my orders and resolved yourself,” explained Kagekatsu. “You would not want to find peace alone, would you? So let me say one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Do not shoot me, Marfa. Do not think about shooting me...and thus bringing peace only to me, Marfa.”

So...

“You will not shoot. Marfa...I will always remain with my subordinates and friends...with your subordinates and friends. And...”

And...

"I am with you. That is our promise, Marfa."

"When did we ever promise that? I don't remember anything of the sort."

"I am making it right now," said Kagekatsu. "Promises are not just made in the past and fulfilled in the present."

Kagekatsu thought.

He thought about the idiot who he had only met a few hours before but had ignored everything to walk right up to him.

He knew that idiot had always regretted a past mistake and had decided to move forward so as to never feel that kind of regret again.

But that idiot had shown Kagekatsu something else now.

He had moved forward, not to rid himself of regret, but to leave regret in the past while gaining a world where he and everyone else could be happy.

If Musashi's Chancellor had been trying to wipe his past clean, Kagekatsu would not have been moved. But that boy had the same thing as Kagekatsu, he had held it with him as regret, and still...

...He said he would go apologize with me.

He was not wiping that regret clean.

If the regret was lost, nothing would remain.

Instead, he would leave the regret as is while obtaining happiness.

That was worth working toward. He could look to the future while still holding that regret inside. And...

...If the happiness you wish for is true happiness, everyone will follow you!

He had to walk forward based on happiness, not regret.

Musashi's Chancellor had shown him it was okay to do that.

The boy may have forgotten all about that because he had continued underground with his friends, but that was fine. Kagekatsu was king of Sviet

Rus.

It had been more than enough just to teach him that he could start forward on his own.

That was an important starting point for him. And he had definitely seen that in the boy. Instead of wallowing in past regrets, he could move forward to avoid future regret and to obtain further happiness.

So he spoke to Marfa.

“We will be bound together until our promise is fulfilled in the future. So...”

He looked her in the eye.

“So, Marfa, will you grow accustomed to regret and grab the reins of happiness with me?”

Marfa gasped.

But silence could be taken as agreement, so she forced out a breath.

“I will shoot.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m stubborn, Kagekatsu.”

The corners of her mouth rose and she fired Maska Orge.

But she did not fire it at Kagekatsu. She reversed her wrist and aimed at herself.

“Honestly. ...Most of my anger has always been directed at my unlovable self.”

She fired.

Maska Orge materialized one’s anger for the target as damage.

...I really am stubborn.

She was not so pathetic that she would take issue with that purge from the past. She had been one of the leaders then too. If she had anything to say now, it was that she should have resisted it more herself. But she had not, she had

chosen to go with the flow, and she had led her subordinates and friends to lay down their lives out of concern for her. She had only her own softness to blame for that.

She understood that the anger she expressed was only the reverse side of what she felt for herself. So...

“I wonder how effective this will be.”

With that thought, she began to close her eyes, but she suddenly stopped.

An external power moved the hand holding Maska Orge.

...It can't be.

Kagekatsu stood before her after throwing aside his staff.

His right hand had grabbed her right hand which held Maska Orge. And...

“Kagekatsu...!”

He had aimed Maska Orge at himself.

It had fired toward him.

Kagekatsu thought to himself after turning Maska Orge's blast toward himself.

...I-I'm scared! This is way too scary!

Part of it had to do with the fact that she had actually fired, but he was also surprised by his own actions.

Marfa had to know he was sweating bullets in his heart. They knew each other long enough for that. But even if she knew how he was feeling, he knew exactly what he had to say.

“Marfa.”

He moved forward. He nodded and took a step toward her with Maska Orge on his right.

“That did not even hurt.”

He held her in his arms.

...I'm not scared! I'm not scared at all!

He could tell his movements were stiff from nerves, but demon skin was nice and hard. His movements would look normal to the others. Or the others were at least kind enough to overlook it if they did not.

But he also felt someone shrinking down and struggling in his arms.

Marfa was not used to this either. And so she spoke.

“You fool... Why would you have me shoot you before myself? ...You’ve had enough interactions with England, so surely you’re familiar with their culture of ‘ladies first’.”

He was. During wartime, English Queen Elizabeth liked to fire Ex. Caliburn before anyone else did anything. That had to be what it meant.

...Such a violent culture.

He would prefer to keep things more peaceful. So...

“I am familiar with it. And that is why I have this to say.” He embraced the woman in his arms. “I will give you a happy future. And that will bring me happiness. That will mean you are always happy slightly before I am, Marfa Boretskaya. In that way, I will allow you to get ahead of me as a traitorous Vedma.”

He heard a breath that might have been a laugh, but she did not struggle.

So he wanted to stay like this for a while longer and he wondered if his friend had found the path ahead while underground.

Chapter 93: Forerunner in a Gathering Place

第九十三章

『会合場所の先駆者』



いつの間に
近寄られたのか
それも解らず
配点（振り返り）

When did

We get so close

And without even noticing it?

Point Allocation (Looking Back)

It was Avalon.

Futayo was surprised when she continued below the entrance hall.

“What is this place?”

It was a circular space the same size as the entrance hall. The ceiling was tall and the passageway from the entrance hall was not a slope or stairway. It was a square black “gate” measuring 5 meters across. And inside...

“A grassy plain, a forest, and a stream...”

The greenery rising to ankle height and the forest giving off a leafy scent were real. The water of the stream audibly circulated and a light easily mistaken for the sun slowly revolved at the ceiling.

“What is this...?”

“It’s the main garden.”

She heard someone step on the grass behind her and turned to see a half-dragon, a mobile shell, Masazumi, and Asama step through the “gate”. And following them...

“So Horizon-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama, and Mary-sama are with us too.”

She omitted the idiot and the ninja. Masazumi tilted her head as she looked around.

“This is the same as Avalon’s system. ...And what do you mean this is the ‘main garden’?”

“Well,” replied the mobile shell. “Our main garden is based on environmental construction technology cultivated since the Age of Dawn. I don’t know what this Avalon you mentioned is, but this is either the starting point of that

technology or one of the places that inherited that technology from the Age of the Gods.”

“A good analysis,” said a voice.

A giant tree stood in front of the large curving southern wall and the trunk had a blackboard hanging on it.

They were indoors, but it still felt like an outdoor classroom. And someone stood there in black clothing.

“Come here. ...We have no time.”

Futayo looked to Masazumi and Masazumi looked to the idiot. The idiot turned to Princess Horizon.

“U-um. ...C-can we go? Is that okay?”

“What has you so scared?”

Princess Horizon called over a silver chain and had it dangle the idiot out in front.

And just as they started to walk, the ninja suddenly spoke.

“Everyone...look around you!”

Asama activated Konoha, her false left eye, just in case.

It instantly scanned her surroundings and confirmed there were no kinetic readings. As it did, it scanned the structure of the walls and placed line drawings over them. But...

“That’s...”

The walls all around them had originally had some kind of pattern.

Images had been carved into them.

They formed giant reliefs far too large to see all at once even when viewed them from the center of the garden. The circular walls were decorated with a total of 8 engravings.

Mary said what they were as her eyes widened and she eventually tilted her

head.

“That’s the story of the Age of Dawn, isn’t it?”

“It is. And there are 8 of them. That’s the same as the number of images on the partition screens last night. From what I can see, the distribution and order of the images is more or less the same...”

This was a great discovery from an academic perspective. But Asama noticed something else as she followed Toori who looked up at the ceiling while carried by the silver chain.

Konoha had not stopped working. There was something it had yet to scan.

...Eh? What?

She did not know what this was. Perhaps it was gathering some initialization information after visiting this unfamiliar place. But at the same time...

<Emergency: Class 1 Taboo Mysterious Phenomenon: Appearance – Underway.> A sign frame appeared to inform her of an emergency situation and another appeared to provide support information.

They warned her of a mysterious phenomenon appearing.

Asama gasped.

Ever since Mikawa, Musashi had supplied all of its residents with divine protections to defend against mysterious phenomena. They had been installed in the residents’ hard point parts and Asama had put together all of Class Plum’s while using all of their different shrines as intermediaries. Considering the possibility of the Princess Disappearances or other mysterious phenomena that took people away, she had made sure she could forcibly purify them by cutting off the ether flow to provide temporary safety.

Light sprayed from the backs of everyone but Narumi.

One barrier’s worth of ether had been cut off in the space behind them.

Because she worked for the Asama Shrine, she first placed the strongest defenses on herself. Then the binder skirts on her left and right hips

automatically switched to free mode. She pulled Katatsubaki and Kataume from the left and right, opened them, and...

“There!” declared Hanami. “Clap!!”

She could see 3 locations where mysterious phenomena were likely to appear, so she quickly checked them.

“Masazumi! Mary! ...Horizon!?”

She quickly saw what appeared there.

...Rings of light!?

Red circles of light that looked almost hand drawn appeared behind those three. They all looked back in surprise and Asama saw a red glowing line extend left and right from the center of the circle. Which formed...

“The Double Border Crest!!”

Asama immediately synchronized Kataume and Katatsubaki and then prepared to fire. Mitotsudaira looked her way.

“Tomo!?”

“I’m on it!”

She drew a purified arrow from her binder skirt and considered going for a rapid fire attack.

But at that very moment...

“...Eh?”

The Double Border Crests behind those three vanished.

Those symbols of the Princess Disappearances left as suddenly as they had appeared.

Asama stopped halfway through nocking the arrow.

...Wh-what does that mean?

The Double Border Crests had vanished. To make sure that was accurate, Hanami looked around.

“It’s okay. Clap.”

The Mouse smiled and clapped.

The Double Border Crests were gone. But it had been a sudden disappearance. There was no indication that anything had even happened. All that remained was everyone looking concerned and Mary clinging to Tenzou.

...Ohh, Mary-san has gotten pretty bold...

“And yet you did nothing at all to me, Toori-kun.”

“The chains! Can’t you see these chains!? I’m kind of tied up at the moment!”

As everyone ignored the struggling crossdresser, the Prince of Orange spoke from behind the large tree.

“The Princess Disappearances, hm? ...I suppose you could call that a double captivity. Although you could also say it’s our responsibility.”

...A double captivity?

Asama questioned it, but she did not understand. But since Masazumi pointed toward the large tree, she turned in that direction too.

They all hurried over there, so she followed.

Masazumi watched Mitotsudaira release the chain and lower the crossdresser to the ground.

The crossdresser stepped out ahead of the others. He stood ahead of them on the grassy field with his back to them.

“Hey, Seijun. What will we do once we see what the Genesis Project is?”

“Think about whether we should stop it or cooperate. ...We still don’t know how the Logismo Oplo are supposed to stop the Apocalypse, so this will hopefully provide a hint.”

“Neshinbara would probably love this,” said the idiot with a smile. But...

...What was that just now?

The Double Border Crest had appeared behind her. In fact, it had appeared

behind more than just her.

...Does it just appear indiscriminately?

Mary had lost her father Henry VIII to the Princess Disappearances, so she had enough of a connection for the Double Border Crest's appearance behind her to make sense.

The same was true of Masazumi herself.

...So is that how it works?

There was no point in confirming that here. Especially when Horizon had no memories of her past. So she focused on following the idiot as he walked out ahead.

She heard a voice from the large tree. It was the Prince of Orange.

"This is a story from the past."

His words rang out.

"We once tried to become friend with the Princess."

"Eh?" said Asama and Crossunite, but the Prince of Orange continued.

"But we failed at that, so we decide to come up with another method. And..."

And...

"We received an ugly sort of salvation."

The Prince of Orange's words stopped there like he was taking a breath.

Masazumi gulped as she listened.

She did not know what he meant, but she understood what must have happened.

...A sacrifice.

Just as Masazumi muttered that word in her heart, Mitotsudaira asked her a question.

"Um, Masazumi? Who exactly is the Prince of Orange?"

It was a little late for that, but it was worth going over, so she nodded.

“His name is actually William, Prince of Orange. His Urban Name is the Resisting Chancellor. There are a number of reasons given as to why he goes by his title as Prince of Orange instead of his name: to avoid assassination or to ward off name-seeking curses sent by Tres España or the Catholics, his enemies in his war for independence. But...”

But...

“Looking at his results, he is a very skilled Chancellor. So if he’s here...”

Just as she said that, she realized the crossdresser had stopped walking. And his unmoving back spoke.

“Uqui, Tenzou, take care of this.”

“Judge...!”

While the others came to a stop, Crossunite and Urquiaga rushed out. Crossunite went in low from the right and Urquiaga went in high from the left. And their paths intersected at the giant tree.

Finally, they straightened up and beckoned the others over.

...What is it?

“I’m not sure, but let’s go. My king, I will make sure you are safe.”

After Masazumi, Horizon, and Asama watched the crossdresser being wrapped in chains again to keep him safe, they jogged over to the giant tree.

The light shining from the sky created a deep shadow below the large trees branches, but as they entered that shadow.

“What happened!? Where’s the Prince of Orange!?”

Urquiaga gestured over with his chin.

Masazumi kept jogging and looked over to see what he meant. She saw the blackboard hanging on the tree.

A Double Border Crest was drawn there.

Masazumi gasped when she saw it.

It was just like with her mother. The Double Border Crest was drawn in blood red and the Prince of Orange was nowhere to be found.

And something was written next to the crest.

As usual the Princess Disappearance came with a message left by the Princess. And it said...

“...What’s keeping Mitsuhide-kun?”

...What does this mean?

Asama asked herself that as she watched the Double Border Crest gradually fade from the blackboard.

Next to her, she saw Tenzou gently hug Mary from behind after she ran up. *Ohh*, thought Asama again. *Tenzou-kun really has gotten better*. But that odd impression aside...

...I need to focus on the Double Border Crest right now.

“Why was the Prince of Orange taken by the Princess Disappearances?”

No, he had given a possible reason earlier. And Horizon pointed that out.

“In other words, if you get too friendly with the Princess, you go bye-bye. That would be the reason.”

“Can you try to treat this with more weight!? Please!?”

Horizon gave her a thumbs up, but if she was right...

“Does that mean Masazumi’s mom and Mary’s dad were friendly with the Princess?”

Mary’s gaze wandered when she heard that. She could not give a definite ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and she finally looked to Tenzou as if to say “I don’t know”. Tenzou responded with a nod.

“Mary-dono, you will not be taken away. I guarantee it.”

He had no proof of that, but it did seem to help Mary calm down. “Judge,”

she said with a smile.

But Masazumi was still not moving.

“Masazumi?”

She did not respond even when spoken to, but when Tsukinowa rubbed against her cheek from her shoulder...

“Eh? O-oh. Um...”

It looked like she had only just noticed Asama. Her face was pale and Asama felt apologetic.

...Her mom was only just taken by the Princess Disappearances last year...

The memory would still be raw and she would not have had time to come to terms with it.

Asama decided she could not ask any further right now, so...

“I will take some evidence that the Prince of Orange was taken by the Princess Disappearances. He is a nation’s Chancellor, so we don’t want anyone thinking we did something to him.”

“Oh, right. Judge...”

Masazumi replied weakly, but then...

“Oh, honestly! I can’t be like this! Sorry!”

Masazumi slapped both her cheeks.

...I can’t be zoning out!

Musashi had decided to continue toward the future, so she could not let her memories of the past overwhelm her when a mysterious phenomenon appeared in front of her. That might be fine if she was alone, but that was not the case here or now. So she slapped her cheeks again and...

“Horizon! Gather your strength and give me a punch!”

She gritted her teeth, saw Horizon raise her right fist, and quickly stopped her.

“Wait, Horizon. That’s too much strength. That would be dangerous.”

“Heh. I have determined I still have much to learn if my excessive talent is causing people to fear me.”

“Okay, Horizon! Then gather your strength and give me a-gfh.”

As the idiot ran over, he received two lazy kicks to the crotch, flew straight up, and fell back down onto his knees.

“Now, then,” said Horizon. “What shall we do, Masazumi-sama?”

“Well,” said Masazumi as she looked to the fading Double Border Crest and the writing next to it.

...What’s keeping Mitsuhide-kun?

“Does that mean,” she said to help calm everyone down, “that the Prince of Orange is just Mitsuhide?”

It was too powerful and everyone froze over.

“Hey! Seijun! We’re okay! We distributed the damage over everyone here, so it didn’t do much to any one of us!!”

“Dammit. And I thought that was a pretty good one too!!”

For some reason, Mitotsudaira spread her mouth to the sides and wagged her raised finger.

“Well, um, how about we investigate the place a little?”

“Eh? Right. Asama, can you start by recording the situation in-...”

Asama and Hanami were already using a heat detection spell to draw out a human-shaped line to record where the Prince of Orange had been. *That looks pretty professional*, thought Masazumi while she checked her sign frame.

Novice: “The English forces are up above, so I’ll have them look over Asama-kun’s results as a non-Musashi witness. I’ve also spoken with the Provisional Council and they will be telling Holland that ‘just as we tried to hold an anti-P.A. Oda meeting with the Prince of Orange, P.A. Oda attacked and he was taken by the Princess Disappearances’.”

Vice President: “Thanks. ...I don’t know what’s going to happen, but it would

be best to keep nothing hidden and to get this information out there as soon as possible.”

“Asama, did he leave anything behind?”

“Oh, yes. His coat is on the ground here. Oh, also his inner suit and his under... wear?”

“...Did he strip?”

For some reason, everyone simultaneously turned toward the crossdressing nudist. Due to the damage from the kicks to his crotch, the nudist hopped back like a shrimp to escape them, but...

“Wh-what’s that look for, everyone!? Sunbathing! He was probably sunbathing! Right?”

“Don’t ask me,” replied Tenzou. “Anyway, this was probably history’s first nudist Princess Disappearance, but did he leave anything else behind, Asama-dono?”

“Yes. This pen had fallen to the ground. It was probably in his coat pocket.”

Asama had Hanami hold it up so as not to get any fingerprints on it. And...

Four Eyes: “Wait! That looks a lot like the graduation gift from the 13th Mutsugoirei Academy!!”

Shakespeare must have seen it through the sign frame, but it was Urquiaga who responded.

“Wasn’t Neshinbara’s school a new one?”

Hanami tilted her head and spun around at that. The pen she showed off was a cartridge-style ink pen and it had the number “01” engraved on the bottom. Also...

Novice: “That looks pretty old. There are traces of it being repaired. The design uses a cross with the corners removed, so it’s probably Tres Españan. But the Prince of Orange was originally a leader in Tres España, so it would make sense for him to have something like that. Then again...”

Neshinbara said more.

Novice: “We fled that academy, but there was a custom of giving out pens like that at the graduation ceremony. So it’s possible that...”

Vice President: “There was an academy like that in the past too?”

Masazumi nodded when Neshinbara answered with “most likely”.

She did not understand what any of it meant, but she felt like they had gathered a few of the pieces needed to reach the answer. Losing the Prince of Orange was a big deal, but it would also give them a chance to contact Holland in secret.

I need to stay positive, she told herself while taking a breath.

She was not zoning out. She was not focused on her past. So...

“Asama...is already ready it seems. Then let’s leave the rest to Novgorod and get out of here. They’re fighting up above, but once they learn we won, that will qualify as the defense of Uozu Castle and should signal the end of the battle.”

So...

“Let’s go.”

To preserve the scene, Asama laid out thin warning shimenawa.

And she followed the others while creating the paperwork to request that Novgorod preserve and continue to investigate the scene.

In front of her and wrapped in a silver chain, Toori looked up at the ceiling.

What is he looking at? Or is he looking up toward heaven to pretend he’s a prisoner? He never does change, does he? she thought.

“...Hm?”

But then Konoha drew a diagram of white glowing lines in her vision. It had been working even after the scan of her surroundings earlier and now it was doing more work she did not understand. However...

...Could it be...?

The giant walls had been engraved with the events of the Age of Dawn, but...

“The ceiling...!”

She looked up to the giant domed ceiling and she saw something there.

A large engraving took up that entire space.

Asama saw the ceiling diagram that Konoha had scanned.

“Something that was erased...and people?”

The outside edges of the domed ceiling were carved with people looking to and extending their hands toward the center. There were enough people to circle all the way around the ceiling. Regardless of race or species, they all looked like they were celebrating what was in the center. And when Asama looked to the center...

...There are marks showing that something was scraped away.

As she had said, there were scrapes on the ceiling showing that something had existed there, surrounded by the people.

It looked like everyone was celebrating whatever had been carved there.

“What in the world was carved in the center there?” asked Mitotsudaira.

Just as Asama started thinking about that, the ground shook beneath her feet.

“An earthquake...?”

No, thought Asama as everyone exchanged a glance. If this was indeed an Avalon and the system worked as Masazumi claimed it did, then it was cut off from the outside crust. Even if Novgorod shook, it would not reach here. But they were definitely feeling a small shaking and trembling.

“Ah,” said Mitotsudaira. “Are you feeling that?”

Horizon nodded at that and placed a hand on Tenzou’s shoulder.

“Are you feeling ‘that’ again? ...Please try to avoid doing so at mealtimes, Tenzou-sama.”

“I feel like I’ve been wrongly accused of something lately. I have, haven’t I?”

“Hey, hey. Calm down, Tenzou,” said Toori. “And don’t even think about using

this shaking to help with that, okay?”

“So I have been wrongly accused! Whatever it is, I’ve been wrongly accused!!”

Asama ignored those weird people and checked on her surroundings. And...

“Something’s coming from above...no from outside!!”

As soon as she shouted that, the ceiling split apart. And a beam of light dropped from the split like a wall.

“Excalibur!?”

It took a blade produced from the ley lines to interfere with the space inside of an Avalon and that was exactly what split this garden in two.

Novgorod appeared to cover the heavens in the western skies of Sviet Rus, but a bluish-white ether blade pierced it from top to bottom.

Its wielder was on the roof of the city hall in northern Novgorod.

It was Katou Kiyomasa.

She had launched a massive light sword from the combined Caledfwlch. She could not see what was below there, but she felt the tactile feedback through the blade’s light. She raised her eyebrows.

“That wasn’t easy, but I pierced Novgorod’s central power system!”

Kiyomasa reached into her skirt and pulled out a reinforced reed tube measuring more than a meter. It was not an ether fuel tank. It held Orei Nero which contained a program. That program would be used on the power system below Novgorod.

“It will self-destruct with a spell! This is meant to bring down and destroy Novgorod! ...Instruct everyone in this region to evacuate!”

With that, she shoved the tube into the combined Caledfwlch’s pommel and removed the upper release plug. That would normally cause the ether to leak out into the air, but...

“Finish this, Caledfwlch...!!!”

The blade's width did not change, but the amount of light grew.

"Fire straight through!"

The sword of light was sticking out the bottom of Novgorod, but its tip pulled back inside. And a beat later, something else arrived.

It was a cannon blast. The tip of the sword burst apart and became a muzzle. Novgorod's lower hemisphere portion swelled out in an instant and then Novgorod violently shook up and down.

A 300 meter wide area at the bottom of that lower hemisphere collapsed.

All that remained was Novgorod's underground bedrock and a torrent of yellow ether light leaking from the central region that supported Novgorod.

That was proof that the power system that kept it afloat had been partially destroyed by Caledfwlch's blast. The ether extracted from the ley lines overheated and burst into flames.

But Kiyomasa did not hold back. She removed the program tank from Caledfwlch's pommel, shoved another one in, and shoved a fuel tank in over that.

"Time for another...!"

Once she yelled that, she saw someone jump up onto the southern end of the roof.

It was a pale demon woman. A hornless one.

"Honjou Shigenaga!"

Shigenaga prepared her Honjou Shield on the roof.

She had a 16-layered one in front of her.

"Firing form!"

She tried to strike from behind and hit Kiyomasa, but...

...Nh!?

It was a noise that told her something was amiss. It had not come from below

the roof. She heard it along with something like blowing wind from the nearby skylight, the windows on the outer walls, and the passageway exits.

It was a voice that sounded like a never-ending “oh”. So...

“Kh...!”

Kiyomasa was defenseless after firing, but Shigenaga saw the girl opening a *sankt okno* and looking her way.

The decision she made after being seen determined everything.

Instead of sending her Honjou Shield forward as an attack, Shigenaga slapped it with her open hand. The force of that impact caused the 16-layer shield to come apart and point downwards. And just as they seemed to pierce into the city hall’s roof...

“I was right!”

The roof grew scorching hot and swelled out. The area from where Kiyomasa stood in the center to the north end remained intact, but the part of the reinforced wood roof directly above the hall was struck from below.

The roof creaked in resistance for a short time, but this was too much for it to bear.

It exploded in a cannon blast from below.

Shigenaga saw the cannon blast pierce the city hall from underground.

The powerful attack seemed to combine multiple demon spells.

The Honjou Shield was not so much broken as it was melted and scattered.

And the roof did not so much collapse as erupt. The overheated roof broke apart and flew up into the air, so the city hall’s central hall was visible below the shimmering heat and wind.

Nothing remained.

The floor had burned and collapsed and the giant blade of light had pierced a large hole straight down from where Kiyomasa stood.

Shigenaga saw her Sviet Rus comrades in the northern entrance to the hall. Kagekatsu was there, Marfa was in his arms, and Saitou was there too. After a nod from Kagekatsu, they started down the passageway.

They were escaping.

Saitou gestured for her to come too, but...

...What happened to the Musashi group!?

The large hole leading below Novgorod was currently burning away.

Even the stairway tunnel leading to it had collapsed. The half-dragon and Date Narumi's mobile shell could fly, but were they in any state to do so? And...

"I must stop them."

She saw two people in the open hole in front of her.

One was Kiyomasa who was piercing Novgorod with the glowing sword coming from her twin spears named Caledfwlch.

The other was a girl wielding a spear and she stood next to Kiyomasa.

"You're Fukushima Masanori, aren't you?"

"We must be leaving soon, but listen: Novgorod is falling and it will be utterly destroyed."

"That's true," agreed Shigenaga.

The enemy was right. Novgorod was already tilting slightly and a low, deep noise was beginning to sound from the bottom.

The fall was too slow to sense yet, but that massive area was pushing down on the air and producing a rumbling noise.

"At this rate, it should take about 4 minutes before it truly begins to fall. Once it strikes the ground, all of the power system's heat will circulate to the accumulated ether. I believe Novgorod will be destroyed in an explosion. This is the end of the fiercely fought Siege of Uozu Castle. ...We will be leaving. We leave it to Sviet Rus to secure this 'land of Novgorod'."

"Is that so?" Shigenaga nodded. "Prepare yourself for a rematch."

“But there are no more history recreations in which Sviet Rus battles P.A. Oda.”

“Not us. ...Musashi against you.”

“Ridiculous.” Kiyomasa raised her eyebrows. “How are they supposed to escape this-...”

“You’ve fought them once or twice now and you still haven’t figured it out? Or do you not want to figure it out? Do you want to think you’ve beaten them and thus you don’t have to fight them again?”

If so...

“You could stand to learn a thing or two about persistence, resistance, and comebacks. After all, Musashi is already our comrade.”

Once Shigenaga said that, the light shattered. The light sword being fired from Kiyomasa’s Caledfwlch was suddenly broken. At the same time, the fuel tank in its pommel exploded.

“What...!?”

“Don’t look so shocked. ...They’re alive and they destroyed your light sword from below. I don’t know if that was Excalibur or some other power, but I know one thing for sure: No matter what kind of battles they find themselves in from now on, they will never forget that you are their primary enemy. There is no changing that now.”

“Th-that was a close one...!”

Masazumi sighed inside the entrance hall below Novgorod. That 200 meter room had a giant hole in the center where Caledfwlch’s light sword had stabbed through it. At the largest point, that sharp hole was about 2 meters wide and 15 meters long and darkness was visible through it, but...

“It was lucky that was a ley line style of ether sword... That allowed it to interfere with the Avalon and pierce the ley line reactor below, but it failed to directly destroy the Avalon and allowed us to destroy the blade.”

On the south side of the hole, Mitotsudaira held one of the Excaliburs and she

exchanged a glance with Mary and the 1st Special Duty Officer who held the other one on the opposite side.

Futayo looked up with Tonbo Spare in hand.

“That is a long way up.”

A point of light was visible far above them.

That was not the light of Novgorod’s city hall. It was the night sky beyond it. There were piles of smashed stone and stairs around the outer edge of the hall, so...

...Fukushima must have destroyed them.

“Hey, Seijun, what are they trying to do right now?”

Novice: “Wait, Aoi-kun! Don’t forget about me! ...Are you listening!? So you want to know what P.A. Oda is trying to do here in Novgorod!? Well, I can only give my best guess, but-...”

Hori-ko: “It sounds like he won’t start for a while, so should we change the channel?”

Smoking Girl: “I’m already on the transport ship back to Musashi, but are you all still wasting time inside? It’s probably going to fall and go boom in about 4 minutes.”

Flat Vassal: “If you don’t get back soon, I’ll eat all of the snacks I brought back from Mogami.”

Asama: “They’re already almost gone!? And shouldn’t you be more worried about us!?”

Vice President: “Seriously though, everyone back on the Musashi needs to think about what’s going to happen to Novgorod and how the Musashi needs to respond. ...Mukai!”

Bell: “Y-yes!?”

Vice President: “I leave control and approval of the Musashi’s response with you, our Acting Captain. Aoi, Horizon, that’s fine with you, right?”

Horizon nodded and Aoi opened a sign frame.

Me: “I know you can handle it, Bell-san, so just do it like normal. I know you’ve been away from the Musashi, so enjoy yourself now that you’re back.”

Bell: “R-right. Judge. And Vice Principal...Yoshinao...?”

We: “Not to worry. We have already provided our authorization.”

Me: “We, you’re real quick with that stuff but slow with doing things for real, so try to work on that. You still haven’t finished fixing Adele’s mobile shell, right? Adele, you’ll just have to resist the urge to be a shield this time.”

Flat Vassal: “I-it’s not like I want to be a shield! It just tends to happen!”

“Isn’t that the same thing in the end?” everyone muttered, but Masazumi could only sigh since it was the usual way of things. And...

Shigeko: “I’m staring the enemy down right now, but my escape ship has arrived. Can you all get up from down there?”

Vice President: “Yes, we’re fine. We’ll be up soon.”

Narumi’s mobile shell raised its hand on Masazumi’s right.

“If I change my power settings and armor placement, I can carry three people at my ascension escape speed. ...What about you, Kiyonari?”

“I suppose I can handle three as well.”

“Then,” said Mitotsudaira while returning Excalibur to Mary. She smiled and made a suggestion. “2nd Special Duty Officer, please carry Mary, the 1st Special Duty Officer, and Futayo. That will be your three. Narumi can carry Masazumi, Tomo, and me while I use the silver chains to carry my king and Hori-...”

Mitotsudaira seemed to realize her mistake as she made it.

“ ...”

She froze in place, so everyone else did as well.

Musashi: “Even if you transfer some of the passengers to the chains, won’t the weight remain the same? Over.”

Principal: “There have been a lot more tests like that lately. Y’know, where you have to think outside the box.”

Asama: “You’re not worried! You’re not worried about us at all!? That’s what this is, isn’t it!?”

Wise Sister: “...”

Novice: “Aoi Sister-kun, why are you glaring at me!? I didn’t do anything!”

Isn’t you not doing anything the problem here? thought Masazumi, but then Narumi placed a hand on her centipede mandible.

“Weight-wise, four people would probably be my absolute limit. And even that would be pretty unstable...”

Mal-Ga: “Then leave it to us! ...We’ll be right there!”

Vice President: “Naruze!? Are you free?”

“Judge,” replied Naruze and Naito’s voice followed.

Gold Mar: “Shibata’s fleet is starting to retreat to the south and Shibata’s forces are escaping Novgorod! ...If you don’t get out of there soon, you’re in real trouble!”

Naito and Naruze embraced in the night sky.

Schwarz Fräulein and Weiss Fräulein were combined. Now that they were literally Zwei Fräulein, they could use their greater acceleration to rush to Novgorod’s city hall.

...We need to hurry.

The Sviet Rus fleets in the north were also leaving Novgorod and descending. They were ensuring they would not be hit by the powerful winds and air currents created when Novgorod exploded.

The bottom of Novgorod was already surrounded in light where the power system was.

And in their great speed, Naruze asked something of her partner in this embrace.

“Margot. ...Can you tell it’s started to fall?”

“Judge. According to my reduction detection, the power system’s ether is only partially escaping. With nowhere to go, I think it’ll overheat and sublime. At this rate, the remaining fuel really will detonate when it crashes.”

As they flew through the wind, they could see the giant floating city. Several curving pillars of light burst from the bottom like flares and they began circulating within themselves.

That process would reach the internal fuel when it crashed and then Novgorod would be blown away as a giant bomb.

Musashi: “Novgorod’s internal power system is of an unknown type, but given its size, Novgorod’s own destruction will be the primary damage, but the secondary damages of scattering fragments and shockwaves will be much greater. Over.”

Mal-Ga: “So it’s like a bomb with shrapnel placed inside to make it more lethal? How far will the damage spread?”

Musashi: “The only records of such a large structure exploding are abstract ones from the Age of the Gods. But based on what data is available...its maximum radius will be about 70 kilometers. The effective range of the blast will likely reach a radius of 21 kilometers.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. They’re done for! They’re done for yet again! My clever brain has been thinking: whenever someone decides to destroy an entire city, they like to make sure it ruins our lives as well, don’t they!? Asama! I’m about to head to the Asama Shrine and infiltrate your room, but is there anything you want me to do before the end!? Like disposing of some sexy underwear!?”

Asama: “I don’t have any of that, so don’t bother. More importantly, there’s a stack of porn games waiting to be poison tested next to the PC on the right side of the room. Could you have them all incinerated in Toori-kun’s name? Also please delete the ‘poison testing’ folder on the PC.”

Me: “S-stop! Those are my...my...! Sob, sob. You’re so mean...”

Mal-Ga: “I’m having second thoughts about rescuing them...”

Gold Mar: “Ga-chan! Ga-chan! Lose motivation and your piloting gets pretty

rough!!”

I guess we need to hurry, thought Naito. As the floating island grew in their vision, they took a rising parabolic arc to arrive directly above the city hall.

But at that very moment, something shot by below them and toward Novgorod.

...Eh?

Naito was briefly confused because she recognized the shape.

But before she could think any further, Naruze shouted the answer.

“Zwei Fräulein!?”

Gold and black wings. White and black wings.

That was what Naruze saw. The multi-wing shape looked a lot like her and Naito flying in combined form, but there was one clear difference.

...It's held together with gravity!

The wings and outer hull were not held on by bolts and expansion joints like they were for Naruze and Naito's Weiss Fräulein and Schwarz Fräulein. The thrusters and wings were held on with gravity and the overall device was sharp and large.

“What is that...!?”

She did not know.

She could not see the pilots from above, but since the wings contained the emblem of Edel Brocken...

“Is that a different version of Schwarz Fräulein and Weiss Fräulein!?”

That was likely. Their versions had been proven effective, but they were still in the prototype stage. So it would make sense for there to be competing versions.

But the problem was whose side these belonged to. The rail wings and *schale besen* had M.H.R.R.'s emblem drawn on them several times. And there were

also emblems saying SPEER-04 and SPEER-05.

That meant this was #4 and #5 of the Ten Spears.

And as the enemy Zwei Fräulein flew by below them...

“Ga-chan, they’re transforming!”

The gravity construction meant it had no frame or expansion joints, so the position of the thrusters and wings could be freely altered.

So the enemy focused most of the thrusters on the back and made use of their powerful acceleration.

“...!”

They instantly shot out ahead.

Naruze and Naito’s ascending trajectory was no excuse. The other pair had gained a powerful kick of power and they left a line of acceleration in the sky.

White mist and a line of residual ether light split the air.

The sound of the splitting air arrived a moment later, but the flying enemy was already passing over Novgorod by then.

They had completely shaken Naruze and Naito.

Shigenaga was there when it happened.

Something flew by at such low altitude that it was better described as “overhead” than “in the sky”. It was low enough that she felt the need to duck.

...A mechanical phoenix!?

No. She had seen gold and black wings, but those were Technohexen thrusters attached to the top, bottom, and center of the *schale besen*.

The metal wings slammed into the wind like it was a solid wall and hopped up in the air. The next thing Shigenaga knew, they were ascending straight up into the northern sky.

Fukushima and Kiyomasa were no longer in front of her. They had been snatched away by the owner of the ether light that had risen into the sky and

was now circling west to disappear into the south. And in their place...

“Musashi’s Technohexen are here!!”

The pair known as Zwei Fräulein dived into the hole in the city hall’s roof without slowing down.

The wind scattered and the roof swelled out, peeled away, and flew. Within that destruction and noise, Shigenaga decided to leave instead of watching it through to the end.

She would hurry to the transport ships still waiting to the north. Or she intended to. However...

...Will we make it!?

The northern transport ships were slow to leave port.

Because Novgorod was slowly beginning to fall, people had to board using suspended nets instead of piers. But the bigger problem was the shell fire from Shibata’s fleet. That fleet had already withdrawn, so as they fell back to the east while Cavendish’s ship fired on them from the west, they were still within range of Sviet Rus’s main fleet.

They used physical shells. A hit from such a long range was more about the density of shots than about targeting, but the occasional hit prevented the Sviet Rus fleet from leaving for the northern sky and everything was brought to a standstill.

“That main force protected everyone as they escaped, but now they’re blocking the way like a giant lid!?”

Then something else happened.

Shigenaga felt a floating sensation at her feet.

Novgorod had begun dropping all at once.

The giant island instantly fell about 100 meters.

The sky roared, the air below spread out in the shape of Novgorod, and white fog formed.

The transport ships at the northern land port lost their stability. If Novgorod had just started plummeting, that would be one thing, but it almost immediately returned to its previous falling speed, so the air bounced back.

The transport ships were shaken up and down and the people climbing aboard desperately tried to hold on.

Then light raced out from below once more.

It was a second explosion and it was far larger than the previous one. So...

“...!!”

Novgorod shook and started to fall again. This was devastating for the collapsing fleet.

A rumbling sound continued without end and the rubble exploded and cascaded down. But...

“...Eh?”

The Sviet Rus transport ships wandered a bit, but they did not fall. The boarding warriors were thrown about, but none of them fell off.

The expected blast of turbulent air never arrived.

The demons yelled “Yes!” or “We’re saved!” to express their relief, but a few voices all asked the same question.

“Why...?”

They were looking below Novgorod.

Something was supporting the crumbling bottom of the floating city.

“Why is the Jurakudai supporting Novgorod!?”

Chapter 94: Fox of the Sun Shower

第九十四章

『天気雨の狐』



晴れた空から降る滴
狐の声は別れと
喜びの雨音に届いて
配点 (幸い)

Drops fall from the clear sky

The fox says goodbye

Into the joyous sound of the rain

Point Allocation (Happiness)

“Komahime...”

A name was quietly called in the sky northeast of Novgorod where the Mogami fleet moved in to drive back Shibata’s fleet. It came from the top of Yamagata Castle’s bridge where Mogami Yoshiaki held two large fans. She pressed a closed fan against her forehead and shut her eyes.

“...It was the promise, wasn’t it?”

She added a “yes” as the wind of Novgorod’s fall washed over her.

It was a thick wind. It reflected off the ground and whipped her hair around.

“It was because we promised to protect Oushuu and Sviet Rus that you chose suicide, wasn’t it?”

So...

“Komahime. You are a clever girl, so fulfill that promise. ...Your mother will not run away. I will watch over you to the end.”

Komahime stood inside the bridge as the ether fuel overheated and ignited.

The ether fuel pipes burst more due to power system malfunctions than the vermilion flames and their heat and flames filled the bridge with light.

Similar ruptures and tremors occurred in the corridors and lower floors and those countless noises reached the bridge.

But Komahime was alone on the bridge; she had ordered the rest of the Jurakudai’s crew to evacuate.

They had all begun sending out the escape ships to reach Shibata’s fleet, so as flames erupted and ether light raged across the bridge, the only words were

spoken by her and her divine transmission *insha kotob*.

The second-in-command's voice-only transmission reached her from one of the escape ships.

"Acting Captain! Everyone is accounted for. We are currently approaching Shibata's fleet while sending out a request to join them!"

"Shaja. ...If Novgorod falls and explodes, it will affect the position of Shibata's fleet too. If I fully open Jurakudai's defense barrier and divert the gravitational cruising power to the exterior, I can slow its fall and delay its destruction. So..."

So...

"Please take Hidetsugu-sama somewhere safe!"

"Shaja...! But Acting Captain, what about you?"

"I'm fine. My regret came from my desire to be with Hidetsugu-sama, after all."

Just a few minutes before, she would have been too embarrassed to say that, but now she could use it as a proper reason.

"I am a ghost. I can't die, so I'll be fine. And second-in-command?"

"What is it?"

"I'm sure Niwa-sama asked you to, but I must thank all of you for teaching me so much and speaking with me. Thanks to that, it looks like I can manage controlling the ship, even if I am just using the auto-settings."

The second-in-command gently responded to that.

"Oh, you're not there yet. Your piloting is still pretty rough. ...There's still a lot we have to teach you."

"Shaja. I look forward to it."

With that answer, Komahime thought, *This is for the best*.

She could see the state of the ship on an *insha kotob* that kept flickering in and out. The Jurakudai had already taken damage from the after effects of the Musashi's attack and now it was recklessly trying to support the Novgorod as it fell.

“You can do it.”

Komahime spoke to the ship as she operated the various power conduits. When one had stopped due to a collapse, malfunction, or excessive power, she rerouted the power around it to keep it distributed across the ship. A ship as large as the Jurakudai had countless power conduits as well as secondary ones for use in emergencies, so she displayed them all on an *insha kotob*.

“You can do it...!”

It got through. A few areas were unusable now, but about 70% of the primary regions had recovered. Outside the bridge, she could see the defense barrier’s multiple layers of light. And in the sky...

“Wah.”

Several giant pieces of rubble fell to the deck. They produced so loud a sound she wanted to cover her ears. When Novgorod’s falling speed had lowered, pieces of its outer hull had fallen away.

But its fall had definitely slowed.

The impact triggered further explosions and shaking inside the Jurakudai. All readings from the rear port side vanished from the *insha kotob*. That meant the port side thrusters had been taken out.

...So there’s no escape now.

And so she made up her mind: she would do everything she could.

“The only other thing I need to do is...”

The ether fuel supply was still being limited. She wanted to use up all of the fuel in these few minutes, but the ship had no such setting.

In that case, she thought as she ran to the captain’s spot in the rear of the bridge while protectively raising a hand and dodging some sparks that fell from the ceiling. There were some manual controls there that opened during emergencies. When the divine transmission controls from the bridge’s *insha kotob* were cut off, these could directly control the ship via physical means.

The gauges were moving. The support *insha kotob* had also opened. *This will work*, she told herself.

After double-checking how to do it, Komahime opened the five control valves. She grabbed the slide switch handles and pushed them to the back, one at a time.

Once this was done, the ship could support Novgorod even more powerfully than before. So...

“I need to do it right...”

She knew the Jurakudai could not fully support the falling city and she was certain that she would disappear in the explosion when the Jurakudai crashed along with Novgorod. But...

“All that matters is that Hidetsugu-sama gets away safely. ...I’m too afraid to check.”

She had her suspicions that Hidetsugu’s failure to wake had nothing to do with his regret. It was because the Seiryu was stealing away the ether forming him.

But if he woke up now that he was freed from the Seiryu...

“He’ll suddenly find out that he’s married to me and that my regret came from my desire to be with him...”

What would he think of that? She knew this was hardly the time to think about that, but...

...He’s already been evacuated.

He had seemed to sleep more peacefully now that he was freed from the Seiryu and she had seen the second-in-command and others from the crew carrying him out as they evacuated.

She was the only one here now. So...

“I need to do this properly.”

She would support Novgorod as long as possible and root for those trying to evacuate. She knew that was something only she could do right now, but...

...It’s hot?

A sudden wave of heat pressed against her back, so she turned around to

check.

The door into the bridge had grown red with heat.

“...!?”

The explosion of heat from a flashover blew her backwards and fried the interior of the bridge.

Flames erupted from the Jurakudai.

In the sky north of Novgorod, Shigenaga used her right arm to hold onto the net hanging from the transport ship above her and she saw ether light fire covering the upper levels of the Jurakudai.

The ether fuel had overheated and it had exploded from the fried and broken power conduits.

She could guess that Komahime had been trying to use all of the Jurakudai's power. She could also guess why the opposite had happened: *...Was it the rubble from above combined with the damage to the ship!?*

The Jurakudai's defense barriers and buffering spells could cover a 7 kilometer area and that power was currently being used to cover the bottom of Novgorod. The gravitational control used for its half-gravitational cruising was being passed through a buffering spell to divert it from the thrusters to the defense barrier.

The Jurakudai itself was currently a giant box of ether fuel and it could not defend itself or move. It was only remaining afloat thanks to the gravitational control balance points that stuck out above and below it via the buffering spells.

Even if someone wanted to go rescue it, giant pieces of rubble were falling and it was groaning under the strain of the gravitational balance. After another scream of metal from the bottom, it broke from the invisible weight of the upper deck.

“...Komahime!”

Flames erupted from the bottom of the Jurakudai as well.

Komahime immediately came to.

She had been slammed against the wall and could say she had been knocked out, but...

...I'm a ghost.

The effects of a concussion would only be reproduced when she was hit by a weapon with that kind of divine protection applied. There were ether flames here now, but...

"When I hit the wall, I was just so surprised that I didn't know what to do."

She left the wall and placed her right hand in front of her. From that position, she lifted her knees and stood up.

"Ah..."

As she stood in front of the controls, her left hip was crumbling away. Like a piece of clothing unraveling, ether light surrounded that area and the lines of her hip disappeared.

She had either been burned by the flames or melted by the overheated ether fuel. She touched it and could feel the skin and the bone within. She may have been falling apart as ether more than as a ghost.

Can this be healed? she wondered before smiling bitterly. Even damage with no divine protection could destroy a ghost if it was powerful enough to destroy the ether mold. If the ship fell and exploded along with Novgorod, she would never survive.

Why am I so worried about my appearance? she thought as she reached for the controls in front of her.

Her left arm was gone.

Noticing that, she glanced to the floor, but it was nowhere to be found.

She placed her other hand on the control panel to support herself. The ceiling structure collapsed like a pillar on the back right end of the bridge, but she only needed the manual controls.

“Move...”

She still had to move 2 of the 5 power conduit levers, so...

“...Nn.”

Even as her body fell apart, she used her remaining right arm to push one of them forward.

It was hard. She was only using one arm this time, but it also seemed to be stuck on something. Regardless, she managed to push it all the way back and then reached for the other one.

She would be done once she did this, so...

“Nn...!”

She pushed it back. At first, she felt something pushing back, but...

...I got it!

It was all the way back. She heard the metallic thunk of it locking into place.

That was all 5. The conduits were fully open now.

“I did it.”

She breathed out and straightened up, but then she noticed something.

The 2nd control lever had moved back to the front.

...You're kidding.

The manual controls were one-way and received no feedback.

“Then were the controls bent when a piece of the ceiling fell...?”

The 2nd control lever's lock would not engage and it had fallen back down. That just meant she had to push it back again and hold it in place by hand. That meant she could not leave this spot, but...

“...!”

Komahime grabbed the lever with her right hand and pushed it. However...

...It won't go in!?

She heard the ship creaking and new ether light sprayed from the ceiling.

The bridge itself bent and the control panel continued to change shape. So the 2nd lever met some resistance as it slid and would not move. She tried a few more times, but it would not move past that point.

“...!”

Komahime used her entire body to push at the control lever. She produced a solid metallic sound, but it only bounced back. She did not have the same power as the creaking and shaking of the ship.

And when she looked out the window, the light in the sky was gone.

The defense barrier opened to support Novgorod was disappearing like a hole had opened in it.

Rubble fell through that gap and she heard the rumble of Novgorod pushing down on the air.

At this rate, the Jurakudai would be unable to support Novgorod and would fall with it.

“No...”

She tried slamming her entire body against the lever, but it was no use.

“No...”

Why was she crying? She raised a leg and tried kicking the lever, but that did not work either. She grabbed a thin piece of the ceiling that had fallen nearby and swung it at the lever.

“Kh.”

But with a metallic noise, the piece of the ceiling broke free of her fingers and flew into the air.

Her hand hurt and she simply stared at the lever that still refused to budge.

“Kh...”

When she took a breath, even more tears spilled from her eyes. At the same time, the front half of the bridge crumbled away in flames. The ceiling collapsed and a cascade of ether spray formed a curtain of light. Komahime took a deeper

breath in the glow of that light.

“...I won’t give up on our promise.”

So she opened an *insha kotob*. It was for controlling the ship. The entire Jurakudai was highlighted either in the red indicating danger or the black indicating an unresponsive area. And the black was growing. But the central control system was still functioning. So...

“If I can’t release all the power to the defense barrier, I can set the ship’s gravitational control to maximum acceleration.”

The bare minimum defense barrier would be held in place with gravity and she would crash the Jurakudai into Novgorod.

The impact would only last a moment, but that would negate more of the Novgorod’s falling momentum than a ship with no power.

Of course, doing that would destroy the Jurakudai with its own acceleration and gravitational control pressure. And that would be the end of Komahime as well. But...

“I made a promise. So, c’mon.”

I kind of sounded like Shakenobe-san there, she thought with a smile.

But she had sworn long ago to preserve peace between Oushuu and Sviet Rus, and...

“Right.”

She had also promised that she would give up her name, go to some distant place with the person she loved, and live there with him forevermore.

She had failed to keep that last promise, but perhaps that was because it had been too convenient a promise for her.

If she died, she had thought it would indirectly count for Hidetsugu’s suicide as well. That was why she had killed herself, but she had not expected him to do the same thing.

But as a ghost, he would be free if he was released from his inherited name. He could return to Date or he could go elsewhere.

If her disappearance would give him that freedom, then what she was doing here was meaningful.

She concluded that she had successfully protected someone other than herself here.

“So let’s do that.”

She placed a hand on the *insha kotob*. She set the Jurakudai’s half-gravitational cruising to full speed and she raised the ship’s angle so it would ascend.

“...Good.”

She stared straight ahead and saw the bottom of Novgorod. She prepared to press the confirmation button on the *insha kotob*. But...

“Mogami Komahime!!”

A sudden divine transmission rang through the bridge.

Komahime recognized the voice but had never met its owner.

...Musashi’s Vice President?

Why was she sending an open divine transmission to P.A. Oda’s Jurakudai? But before she could think on that question, the arriving voice pierced her body.

“Mogami Komahime! This is Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi speaking on behalf of the Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President!”

And...

“Musashi will now take action to ensure we don’t lose you.”

“That’s what we’ll do.”

North of Novgorod, the Sviet Rus fleet was descending more rapidly than the city and flying further north, but a giant city ship made of 8 ships was also descending at the same speed as Novgorod.

An idiot in a summer uniform stood on the academy bridge at the back of

Okutama.

The idiot had a silver wolf in front of him, a silver-haired automaton at his side, and a spell control shrine maiden and a dancer behind him. And to his right...

“Neshinbara, what happens next in your dream scenario?”

“It’s simple. The Musashi’s main cannon fires on and blows away Novgorod’s power system. That rids it of the elements that would detonate when it crashes.”

“Based on the range I was told earlier, that should work just fine,” said Tenzou on the left as he and Mary used a telescope spell to measure their range.

“Okay, then that’s what we’ll do.”

“Hey, Mogami...um...”

Komahime gasped at the boy’s voice she heard.

...So they don’t lose me...?

That’s impossible, she thought. But...

“Hey, Umahime.”

“It’s Komahime!!”

“Sure. So we’re about to help you energize or whatever, but we need a bit of time. So, um...how long do we need, Seijun? 2 minutes? That’s way too long! Make it 1! ...Oh, sorry, ‘Musashi’. U-um, 1 minute 17 seconds? That’ll work? You can cut it down that far? Okay, Umako, you hold on for that long.”

“Huh?”

“No, not ‘huh’,” he said with a laugh. “Hold on for 1 minute and 17 seconds before you fall. We’ll save you, so you do your best to make sure you can be rescued. Y’see, we’re like some poor little rabbits that are feeling cornered after losing a major battle. We’re bunnies.”

For some reason, it sounded like someone hit someone, but Komahime had a

major concern.

“It’s no use! The machine here won’t move!”

“Ugh... Ow... W-well, get it to move?”

“Why was that a question? ...And I can’t just get it to move. It isn’t possible...”

“Is it broken?”

This time it was a girl’s voice. The voice sounded calm but also contained a hint of a worried emotion. *What a strange voice*, thought Komahime as she looked to the control panel.

The control panel was not broken. It was only bent which kept the control lever from moving. So...

“It isn’t broken. It just isn’t moving...or can’t move...”

“Then there is nothing to worry about.” Some relief entered the voice. “If it is not broken, then it can be moved. And even if it is broken, it can still be moved as long as there is a hand to move it. Right now, your hands are there. And as long as they are, you can move it. Komahime-sama, throw out your despair and grab something else instead.”

“Who are you?”

“A café employee. ...So I am used to making gambles.”

Komahime did not understand that, but...

.../ see.

Her right hand was unharmed, so she moved it. She opened an *insha kotob*, looked back over the power system since it could apparently still control divine transmissions, and set it to the full power available in this situation.

It was not as much as before, but the defense barrier returned outside. However...

“ ... ”

It groaned as a great pressure reached it from above.

Novgorod’s fall was speeding up.

But she had to support it with the Jurakudai, so...

“I’ll do it.”

She held her right sleeve in her mouth and pulled it back. She rolled the sleeve up to her shoulder and once more grabbed the unmoving 2nd control lever.

When she pulled it back and then pushed forward, she felt the metal hit something. *This is the wall*, she thought. *If I can get past this, it’ll work.*

She calculated how long until Novgorod’s fall after the power adjustments from the divine transmission control. She spoke while sending the results to Musashi.

“The power will fail within 42 seconds. ...If I don’t get the Jurakudai’s full power running by then, Novgorod will fall. And if it begins to fall in 42 seconds...”

“Don’t worry. If we can save you, then you can do it.”

She did not know what he meant by that, but she oddly felt like everything would be okay. So...

“Kh...!”

She gathered strength in her right arm and pushed at the control lever.

The divine transmission from Komahime cut off just as the Musashi began to transform.

It all began with “Musashi” spreading her arms backwards from the top of Musashino’s bridge where she could look out upon everything.

“This new equipment is useless for cleaning, but...”

She drew two black-sheathed swords from the air. One was a short sword and the other a long sword. Ether light sprayed out as she pulled them out and she fixed the scabbards in the air.

Sakai spoke as he sat on the bridge roof next to her and puffed at his pipe.

“ ‘Musashi’-san, you’re actually really into this, aren’t you?”

“What aerial ship would not want to use her new equipment? Over,” said “Musashi”. “Now, everyone aboard the Musashi. At the request of the Musashi King, the Musashi Viceroy, and the Musashi Vicereine, Musashi will use its main cannon to remove the obstacle in its path. This is not a test firing; it is an official firing. This action has the approval of the Novgorod Mayoress and Sviet Rus Chancellor who own the aforementioned obstacle. The negotiations have already been settled, so I will now remove the main cannon’s firing safety. Everyone, prepare the Aerial City-class Gravitational Cannon ACC-GC0021 Kanesada. This time we will be using it in main barrel mode: ACC-GC0021L Large Kanesada. Over.”

“Musashi” then slowly drew the two swords from their floating scabbards.

And with that the Musashi opened up.

It was entering main cannon firing form which was based on the gravitational cruising form.

The transformation began with every ship’s gravitational cruising wings opening.

But even more opened. Before, they had primarily opened on the outer edges of the Musashi’s ships, but now...

“Do it just like before, but all of them this time!! Keep working and get it all up and running!!”

On the orders of the engine division chief, wings opened on the inner edges as well. And...

“Send ascension commands to the outer thrusters! We’re gonna support the 2 center ships with only the outer ships!!”

“Musashi” could tell her gaze was lowering.

When preparing for gravitational cruising, the virtual ocean along the outer hull would vanish. To make up for the lost buoyancy, they would accelerate forward and use that powerful forward momentum to keep themselves from

“falling”. But the thrusters were not active at the moment. All of the ships were slowly falling.

As soon as she felt a little lightweight due to the falling motion, sign frames appeared around her.

“Asakusa and Shinagawa have finished preparing their outer gravitational cruising thrusters for horizontal firing! Over!”

“Same for Tama and Murayama! Over!”

“Same for Takao and Oume! Over!”

“Same for Musashino and Okutama! Over!”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded and continued slowly drawing the swords. “All ships, lock yourselves in firing position. Over.”

Light exploded outwards from the 1st through 3rd port and starboard ships.

That was the acceleration light of gravitational cruising, but it was not exploding backwards to push them forwards.

It was exploding downwards.

All of the thrusters along the outer hull were aimed down.

“Well done. Over.”

The power used to propel them forward was now being sent down to propel them upwards.

Shigenaga viewed the sight from the deck of the transport ship as it returned to her flagship.

The ships on the Musashi’s port and starboard sides were producing an expansive light and wavering down from the outer hulls.

She understood the idea. Before, the Musashi’s gravitational thrusters would have been fixed in the backwards-facing position, but now...

“Did they use the remodeling to make them movable!?”

Her very question was its own answer. Once the outer thrusters moved out

into the open, they rotated and pointed downwards to support the ships.

The downwards acceleration on the outer edges was also transferred to the inner edges using buffering spells. Light gradually wrapped around the bottom of Musashi's port and starboard ships.

...It's like they're cruising on a sea of light.

But two of the ships received none of the acceleration light: the central two. Their freefall state was not supported by the gravitational acceleration light. Instead, the towing belts let out a metallic groan as they connected those two to the other ships.

Shigenaga did not have to wonder why they would do that. With something like a metallic scream, the central ships shook in the air while supported by the towing belts.

The lights visible on the inner edges of the port and starboard ships were probably sparks caused from the towing belt connections. On occasion, the vertical stretching of the towing belts stripped some of the armor away and it would scatter through the night sky.

What were they hoping to accomplish with this?

But as Shigenaga watched, the central ships' descent slowed.

They were probably supported by the ships to their left and right.

As her body floated up and everything seemed to be scooped back up by the wind, "Musashi" slowly finished drawing the two swords.

At the same time, the towing belts extending from the port and starboard ships finished supporting the central ships.

But Musashino and Okutama were being pulled up on the left and right, so they were bent in a shallow U shape. To fix that distortion, "Musashi" raised the long Kanesada sword in front of her eyes.

As she did, light wrapped around the straight sword-shaped ram on Musashino's bow.

That light extended forward in a longer version of the same shape. Light also raced from the stern like a ribbon connecting the two central ships. And that second light tied itself to the stern with a bow.

Meanwhile...

“So, ‘Musashi’-san, is your weight okay?”

“First my age and now my weight? Over.”

“Well, I mean, things are looking pretty bad to the left and right. And you fell a little just now.”

“That was not falling. It was descending. And it was Musashino and Okutama that descended, not me. In other words, it has nothing to do with me. Over.”

Musashino: “Principal Sakai, could you please avoid provoking the overall captain? Over.”

Okutama: “Agreed... And, yes, we are very heavy, aren’t we...? Over.”

They develop nicely once their thought experience accumulates enough, thought “Musashi”.

“Now. ...We only need to open the barrel. The virtual barrel. Opening main barrel. Over.”

With that, “Musashi” moved.

She slowly pointed the long sword forward.

She aimed the tip toward Novgorod.

But it was not just the sword tip that pointed in that direction.

“Musashi Large Kanesada...main barrel open. Over.”

It began below the Musashino’s bridge. A barrel made of ether extended to the front and back from the thruster installed below the bridge. It was a two-way rotation barrel with a defense barrier built in.

The giant barrel loudly turned on its axis and the two pieces fit together front to back like they were constructing a great tower. And...

“Asakusa, Shinagawa, Tama, Murayama, Oume, Takao...beginning main barrel

service. Over.”

“Musashino and Okutama...beginning main barrel service. Over.”

The thrusters on the inner sides of the port and starboard ships faced inwards. Those on the central ships pointed upwards and they formed lines of gravitational control light which supported the barrel.

The barrel was raised to the same height as the inner thrusters of the port and starboard ships.

“Sakai-sama. ...Do you understand now why we descended? Over.”

“It’s beautiful.”

“Musashi” glanced over at Sakai and then sighed.

“I will tell everyone you said so. Over.”

The barrel pierced front and back between the port and starboard ships. And at the very back...

“Musashi Chancellor, I give you the highest position in charge of Musashi’s martial activities. Please provide assistance to allow synchronization between all the parts. Over.”

“Sure. Just leave it to me.”

With that, light appeared from the back. Musashi’s Chancellor had activated his ether supply spell.

A festival had begun on the academy bridge.

Musashi’s Chancellor stood there and, when the giant barrel extended back to him, he used his ether supply spell.

“Let’s get this started.”

With about 20 on the left and 20 on the right, lines indicating ether supply connections raced out into the air like whips. They struck the thrusters on the inner sides of the port and starboard ships and on both sides of the central ships and they provided those thrusters with light.

“...!”

Behind him, a shrine maiden twanged her bow and a dancer danced to pressurize his spell.

The 40 or more ether supplies grew to twice that number and all of the Musashi’s inner thrusters roared in unison like they were musical instruments.

“Contact!!”

The silver wolf grabbed the back of the barrel with her silver chains. She pulled on it to inform the Musashi of its exact position. Then the Acting Captain’s voice reached them.

“Making...contact...!”

On the deck of Shibata’s flagship, the Kitanoshou, Shibata watched it with everyone else.

“Hold on. Who were those powerful nations that claimed to have the Far East under their provisional rule? They sure have egg on their face now...”

Shibata clenched his teeth in a smile as the large cannon completed its barrel which measured more than 8 kilometers in length.

“How can they create such a large cannon with nothing but defense barriers and gravitational acceleration control?”

He was answered by Fuwa. She scanned the optical and ether readings and she opened her mouth.

“I think this is the accumulation of the Musashi’s experience as it has continued flying for 30 years...no, technically for 160 years. They have learned to balance such a large ship and have honed the gravity barriers that defend it. And in recent years, they’ve installed gravitational thruster technology and gained experience using that. ...You could call this the skill of an experienced craftsman.”

“I’m glad you dumbed it down for me at the end there. But how much can that thing do?”

“Shaja.” Fuwa nodded and scrolled through the readings she had taken. “It can pierce through the half-destroyed Novgorod. Depending on the makeup of the shell, it might even be able to entirely destroy the city. For example...”

Yes.

“Musashi currently has enough striking power to split a floating island the size of Aki’s Itsukushima.”

Shibata lightly whistled at that.

At the same time, flames rose below Novgorod.

They had erupted from the rear of the Jurakudai. As everyone watched, the defense barrier shrank and just about disappeared. And if it did...

“The Jurakudai will fall!”

Komahime barely managed to bring back her consciousness.

Some of the falling rubble had hit the top of the bridge. That had knocked part of the ceiling down, that had hit her, and she had passed out for just a moment.

There was just one thing she had to do now: support Novgorod above her.

There were people working hard to save her, so she had to work hard too.

But the tilting of the ship and her unsteady footing told her the ship was beginning to fall. The countdown on the *insha kotob* had reached 20.

“Right...”

She nodded, grabbed the control lever with her right hand, and pushed.

It moved, but it once more stopped partway back.

She pushed.

It would not budge, but she had to keep pushing. There was nothing more she could do.

...I won't give up!

With that thought, she leaned her entire body forward. She pushed with her

shoulders behind it.

“...”

She thought she heard some creaking metal. It was a tiny, nearly inaudible sound, but it was definitely coming from the base of the control lever.

...Move!

Just as she thought that, the Jurakudai hopped up with a heavy reverberation. It was enough for her feet to leave the floor. The lever just about left her hand, but she held on and pressed her body against the control panel. But...

“...!”

Wind passed by overhead. She heard the ceiling breaking and splitting. And the sky came into view. But it was not the night sky she saw when the upper armor was blown away.

It was the stone of Novgorod’s bottom surface.

The stone fell from the giant structure in the sky. It was falling straight toward her.

...Kh!

Komahime did not let go of the control lever.

“Move...!”

The stone was going to reach her. It was going to crush her. But just before it did...

“You might not need it, but I came to rescue you.”

Someone placed their left hand on her right hand.

Komahime looked to her right.

She could not believe who she saw.

...Hidetsugu-sama...

No.

“Kojirou-sama!!”

“Testament. It’s been too long, Komahime.”

I...

“I’m here to fulfill my promise.”

The boy with a single dragon horn raised his right hand. When he moved it, something raced by overhead. It was a giant arm made of ether. It was the right arm of the Seiryu’s ether form.

Kojirou used the azure metal arm to strike the falling stone.

The roaring noise became an umbrella that defended against and protected her from everything.

Komahime saw him turn toward her.

He had a smile in his eyes.

“I woke up in the launching zone’s lobby, but there was a letter there. They were apparently acting on the instructions of someone named Niwa, but it said they had given me a divine transmission connection with Musashi and that we should work toward something together. ...It said that’s the first thing any married couple should do.”

“S-sorry...”

Komahime knew it was an emergency, but she still wanted to run away and hide.

“E-even if I didn’t have much choice, I still made myself your concubine without your permission...”

“That’s fine. My regret was the same as yours.”

“———”

Bluish-white light stirred from the left hand he had placed on her hand.

It was the dragon’s power. It was the proper form of the Dragon God’s power which used the Seiryu to protect those of the Date family. It surrounded her body.

“Ah...”

Her left arm and hip regained their form. She felt a little embarrassed that he was seeing her bare arm, but she still looked him in the eye and nodded.

“Then...”

Komahime and Kojirou grabbed the control lever together.

And before they began to push, a giant and powerful hand lowered to support them.

It was the Seiryu’s right hand. With that light and power protecting them, Komahime spoke.

“Here goes...!”

In the sky over western Kantou IZUMO, a girl sighed on the bridge of the Date flagship, the Aoba Castle, as it defended the Ariake.

A blue gate of light was faintly visible behind her, but it produced no wind and simply pulsed with light.

The girl rested her sword on the deck and turned her one eye to the west.

“Kojirou. ...So you ended up being the first to use the Seiryu’s power properly.”

She sent a weak but definite smile in that direction.

“You decided to take the path that would save Date. And...”

She shook her head and raised her lowering head.

“We will not forget it.”

“Toori-sama, Asakusa and Shinagawa have detected the recovery of power in the Jurakudai below Novgorod. Novgorod’s altitude has stabilized! Over!”

After that divine transmission from “Musashi”, the barrel’s direction was fixed in place.

As Toori stood behind the very bottom of the giant barrel, a targeting sign

frame appeared in front of him.

“Ohh!” He smiled with the firing portion of the barrel’s back end in front of him. “We created something pretty badass, didn’t we?”

The idiot then looked to Masazumi who was crossing her arms behind him.

“Hey, Seijun. How do you shoot this thing? You did it earlier, right?”

“I did command the firing, but...that was a test firing of the short barrel, Small Kanesada, at 30% power. And we were firing straight down, so there was no distortion to the barrel and the service thrusters didn’t have to do much. The shell was also a lot like a non-piercing air blast. ...So this will be the first official firing.”

“Hmm,” said the idiot while turned around to speak with Masazumi.

In search of something to lean on, he placed a hand on the nearby sign frame.

“So how do I shoot this thing?”

“ ‘Musashi’ will target it for you.”

“Then do I have to shout something? Like ‘Musashi Beeeeeeeeam!’ or ‘Tenzou Crotch Short Barrel Blast!’ or ‘Wabisa-beeeeeeeeeam!!’ ”

“Wh-why would you use me in your joke!? I’m trying to monitor the target’s range, so I can’t give a decent reaction right now!”

“Hey,” cut in Urquiaga’s voice. “Don’t leave out Narumi and me just because we’re out on Musashino’s bow monitoring the range from there.”

“As the overall captain, I must ask that you do not shout anything weird. Especially that 2nd one. Over.”

“Hmm, so even ‘Musashi’ asked for a retake, huh? ...Okay, everyone, think up a good thing to yell in the next 3 seconds.”

“Wait, you idiot.”

“Hmm... Seijun-kun, yelling that when we fire wouldn’t be very funny...”

“Wait, um,” said Mitotsudaira and Asama. The two girls were looking at the sign frame out in front. It was set to grow solid when touched, so the idiot was leaning his hand on it and sitting on it.

“W-wait! Um, my king?” said Mitotsudaira. “Can you look at this?”

“Y-yes, Toori-kun. This, um, might be bad.”

“Hm?”

The idiot followed their gazes and Masazumi also pointed out ahead.

“Look more carefully. They mean that.”

“Hmm?”

The idiot peered at the sign frame which contained the word “Authorize?” and a handprint.

“Huh?”

The idiot looked between his hand and the authorization handprint for a few seconds before quickly looking up at the giant barrel.

The barrel had already begun its two-way rotation and moved forward to cock itself.

“Ah, hey... Wait, you idiot!!!”

With that yell, the Musashi fired its main cannon.

Suzu sat in the seat installed for her on Musashino’s bridge.

“Wah.”

She felt the seat rotating backwards, but just as she thought about asking why, it happened.

The Musashino and Okutama were knocked back by the cannon’s recoil.

The two ships hanging from the towing belts rushed backwards through the air like they were sliding on rails. With her seat turned backwards, the force of it pushed her into the seat back.

Toori’s ether supply was cut off and ether sprayed out between him and the port and starboard ships.

And Suzu sensed those port and starboard ships spreading outwards in a fan shape to absorb the motion of the Musashino and Okutama as they were

pushed back by the force of the cannon.

The towing belt connectors and the ships' movements were the key.

Suzu displayed the model of the Musashi in front of her and swiftly moved her hands to tell the ships how to move. To prevent the towing belts from snapping, she had to make sure the central ships did not go too far.

...U-um...

She pictured it like a model boat being pulled by the current of a stream. The more it tried to move, the greater the resistance. So...

"Like this...maybe?"

She had recently come into contact with ether wind pressure while at Date, so she had an even greater feel for wind than before.

...Yes. This will...work.

All of the Musashi moved back about 2 kilometers while dropping its speed. The port and starboard ships were positioned a little further forward, but the central ships were pulled back to them by the towing belts. Meanwhile, the barrel had finished its role, so it scattered as countless fragments of light and all of the ships were surrounded by a virtual ocean.

Then she shifted her focus forward.

Novgorod. Suzu turned her entire seat around to face the center of that floating city.

"It's empty..."

The hemispherical bottom had a round hole straight through it.

Yoshiaki had stopped moving.

The wind was blowing.

Musashi had fired its main cannon. Even with buffering spells suppressing the shockwave when it fired, some noise and wind were unavoidable.

"Turn the bow straight toward Musashi's muzzle! We're going to ride this

out!”

This was no time to be approaching Shibata’s fleet while also moving toward Novgorod.

Yoshiaki could see Shibata’s forces doing the same. They had already withdrawn to the southwest, but they were using the same wind to gain even more distance.

But even as the undulating winds passed by and a few of the ships’ virtual oceans were scattered, Yoshiaki saw something.

As Novgorod fell helplessly with its power system gone, the Jurakudai appeared below it as what could only be called wreckage.

The ship had been crushed flat and it was lit like a stage by the erupting flames and scattering ether fuel.

And Yoshiaki saw something else.

Two people stood on what little remained of the deck by the bow.

It was Hashiba Hidetsugu and Komahime.

They were holding hands and looking her way.

Komahime realized her end had arrived.

She was not dying. She had already died and was currently at a place beyond death.

“My regret is gone.”

The power allowing a ghost to exist was their attachment to the world of the living.

She had felt regret because she had wanted to be with him.

He had felt regret because he had wanted to be with her.

So now that they knew they could be together, their regrets vanished and they could no longer remain in the world of the living.

They would leave this world together. She could not quite put it to words,

but...

“I’m glad,” he said by her side. “There’s a lot I left undone, but I’m glad there’s nothing I regret not having done.”

“So am I.”

Komahime pulled on his hand. They faced north together. They smiled toward the giant form floating there. Toward the Musashi.

Novgorod fell behind them. It had lost all power and fell as a mere corpse. It was picking up speed and moved like water blown along in the wind, but the Jurakudai endured it. Finally, they heard some noises below them. They heard stone colliding with stone and a great mass of it collapsing, knocking over trees, and falling into a canyon.

But Komahime opened her mouth with all those sounds of destruction in the background.

“Thank you very much.”

Asama saw the two of them bow on the large sign frame.

If they had done nothing, those two might have still been together, but they would have fallen with Novgorod and been destroyed.

Allowing them to be like this was only a small difference, but...

“Toori-kun.”

Asama looked to his back as he scratched his head and viewed the two in the sign frame.

“And Horizon.”

Horizon glanced back toward her. With that as her cue, Asama continued.

“The two of you chose not to lose someone, so you resisted and now you are smiling.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Are you smiling?”

And...

“You can smile, can’t you?”

“Yes,” confirmed Asama as she, Mitotsudaira, and Kimi (who had moved up close to Asama’s side) all smiled. Horizon could not smile, but she looked at the others and spoke.

“Once I have more of my emotions, will I have my own thoughts about this? But even without all of my emotions, I still want to be with all of you. And I believe I will feel the same even with all of my emotions. After all...”

After all...

“I could not have done this if I was alone or if I only had Toori-sama with me.”

“Then,” said Asama with a smile. “Let’s continue on together, Horizon.”

“Judge,” agreed Horizon.

And as Asama looked to Horizon and Mitotsudaira, Kimi embraced her arm and whispered in her ear.

“So as soon she announces the creation of a harem, you speak up to claim your spot?”

“Wh-what are you talking about!? I am a shrine maiden! A shrine maiden!!”

“Heh heh. Then maybe I should take the assistant/supreme commander role...”

She was not listening. Horizon did not seem to have heard and was tilting her head, but based on Mitotsudaira’s reaction, she had caught on. Mitotsudaira glanced over at Horizon, looked like she was about to protest to Kimi, but then turned her back, hung her head, and sat on the bridge.

...A-at least deny it!!

Asama had to wonder why she felt so panicked and cornered right now. She started to come up with some ways to reject or confirm this, but she stopped because she he had a bad feeling about how it would turn out.

So to reject it for the time being, she used the same reasoning she always had: *...Right. Our roles are just too different! Our roles! A pervert and a shrine maiden don’t go together at all! So we’re not close at all. We’re miles apart.*

Then Masazumi approached from behind. She looked to the barrel's ether light as it continued to scatter into the sky and she formed a relieved smile.

"That was like a powered-up version of Asama's already powerful blasts, wasn't it? Who would've thought Aoi would take over Asama's role."

"He's moving closer to my role!?"

But wait, is that really my role? she wondered. I've spent way more time working on divine transmissions and tuning, but I guess life is all about what makes the biggest impact.

Regardless, the situation was still underway on the sign frame in front of them.

The two people on the Jurakudai were fading as light surrounded them.

With their regrets gone, they were disappearing.

Komahime looked to the northeast.

She saw the familiar shape of the Yamagata Castle. Her mother had to be watching her. And her mother was a strict person, so she had to be celebrating what Komahime was doing.

After all, foxes left their parents when they grew up. So...

"Mother...!"

She called out. She shouted the words she had been unable to say when she tried to go away before.

"I kept my promise! You take care of the rest! I am no longer Komahime, so I will go with someone who is no longer Kojirou-sama, live happily, and never return to Mogami!"

She squeezed the hand she held. That hand barely existed anymore, but...

"Exactly right."

He squeezed back and that strength seemed to push more words from her mouth.

“Thank you for everything! And...”

According to the Testament, the Mogami clan would gain its greatest territory after Sekigahara, but due to a subordinate’s plot, its heir would be lost and it would be purged. It would lack the number of clan members needed to continue and it would fall into decline.

Aged Yoshiaki would grow ill when that happened, but...

“Take care of yourself...!!”

Komahime thought her mother would be okay, but it was still worth wishing her well.

And she opened her throat.

She produced the voice that foxes used to say goodbye to their parents.

“Ke...”

That voice rose into the heavens.

“...n.”

Once the reverberation faded, she sensed light.

She felt her and the boy next to her floating upwards.

“We’re leaving now.”

The two of them nodded and she left.

Yoshiaki watched the light rise into the sky.

Two spiritual lives were released from their humanoid forms and, in this case, chose to ascend.

Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes as her daughter’s cry of parting echoed in her ears.

...That brings me back.

She too had made that cry when she left on a journey. She was still single and had never been reunited with her mother or the others, but Komahime had a husband who had chosen to leave on that journey with her. So...

“Take care. ...Komahime.”

That is my one and only wish, she thought.

Then rain poured from the clear night sky. The Musashi's cannon had disturbed the air at the higher altitudes and brought this sun shower from the night sky. Shakenobe cried out in joy as the water fell on him behind her.

“Yoshiaki-sama! Is this what they call a fox's wedding, mon!?”

“Yes, it is. Heh heh. ...Komahime, you are such an excellent child.” Yoshiaki's wet bangs hid her expression. “Your mother had you without a partner, so I never knew this rain. ...Seeing it now...heh heh...makes me feel like I've been wed too.”

She ignored the drops flowing down her cheeks, formed a smile on her lips, and hid those lips behind her fan. Then she opened a sign frame and spoke.

“Satomi Yoshiyasu. ...We can call this your victory.”

“I wasn't really trying to compete with you.”

“Then are you saying this was the natural way of things?”

“Yes. ...Everything found its way to where it belonged. That's all.”

“Testament,” said Yoshiaki. “Mogami will now support Musashi with everything we have. That is Mogami's vote in the Hidetsugu incident.”

“Testament,” agreed the ruler of Date in Kantou's sky.

She looked back and up to see the Seiryu's gate had closed behind her.

“Date will also trust in Musashi and we swear to support Musashi in its fight against Hashiba.”

Masamune's shoulders relaxed as she exhaled and she brushed up her bangs.

Below her one eye and the sword guard eyepatch over the other, she smiled. And she spoke while her comrades lined up on the deck and bowed westward to support her.

“Kojirou desired and worked to fulfil that promise, so we will set that as our

vision of the future. But it we will no longer restrict ourselves to Oushuu and Sviet Rus. We will remake it as a promise to Musashi which visits all of the Far East.”

“Sviet Rus will also follow you when the time comes. And we will pay a deposit now.”

Masazumi heard Kagekatsu’s divine transmission on the academy bridge.

...A deposit?

As she looked around, something like the ground itself rose from below.

It was a group of ships. It was the entire Sviet Rus fleet. And they were floating upside-down. The more than 100 ships were a mixture of unharmed and damaged, but they all lined their decks up alongside each other.

“Until we meet again, Musashi!”

With Marfa held in his left arm, Kagekatsu waved from the flagship’s deck.

Among those looking up at him, Masazumi saw the idiot waving back.

When she thought about it, casually waving to Uesugi Kagekatsu, the representative of Sviet Rus, should never have happened from a global perspective.

She never would have imagined this situation half a year ago.

...This is all so crazy.

And then the deposit arrived.

A coffin-shaped Sviet Rus drop container was dropped from Kagekatsu’s side.

It fell through the air.

“Wah.”

And as soon as it hit the bridge, it opened with a solid sound. It spread out like a flower to reveal...

“Maska Orge!”

Chapter 95: Passersby En-Route

第九十五章

『途上の擦れ違い人』

いずれ行く道
されど来る道
重なり合わり逃れられぬ道
配点 (上下)

Paths that must eventually be taken

Paths that will arrive regardless

Paths that overlap and cannot be avoided

Point Allocation (Above and Below)

Masazumi gasped at the giant white and black bow standing before her.

At the center of everyone's attention, Horizon looked up into the sky and bent her knee in thanks. She then picked up the giant bow and handled it as gently as she might a hairpin.

"Who should I test it on?"

"Why's everyone looking at me!?" shouted Toori. "Did I do something wrong!?"

Masazumi and everyone else nodded, so Horizon fired a shot. The idiot used his fingers to form a heart in front of his chest and leaned back to express the damage, but...

"H-huh? It didn't hurt! Horizon! Does that mean you don't feel any anger toward me!?"

"That's strange... Oh, the battery is dead. The indicator is blank."

"Oh, sure enough," confirmed Asama while watching several confirmation sign frames appearing and disappearing around Horizon. "The confirmation process is running fairly slow. I'm not sure if you would call that life-like or what... But isn't this great, Horizon? Now hitting and criticizing Toori-kun will be all the more worthwhile."

"Heh heh heh. Shrine maiden, do you have any idea what you're saying? But... that makes 4. Just 1 more and we're past the halfway mark. Isn't that amazing!? The halfway mark! If we view the journey as the shape of a boob, then we're on the bottom half now! Like right here on Asama! C'mon, Adele, don't look away! Feel free to touch it! Stick your fingers in the cleavage and you'll be blessed! Even if you're flat yourself!"

Masazumi ignored the crazy person and looked up into the sky. She watched the Sviet Rus fleet which was still upside-down and already several kilometers away and she thought about the number of Logismoï Oplo.

“So we’ve reached the midpoint of our own task.”

Horizon was staring at Maska Orge and occasionally holding it up, which forced everyone to scream and run out of the way, so she was the same as always. But when counting Olos Phtonos, the Far East had now gathered 4 Logismoï Oplo.

...So the world might really be coming to an end.

That belated thought came to Masazumi. And...

“That thing we saw below Novgorod...”

What was it?

While holding off Kimi who was trying to shove double karate chops between her breasts from below, Asama used a sign frame to go over the events of the day.

Starting from the morning, there had been Futayo and Kimi’s training, the special student general assembly, the second meeting with Yasuhira, the three nations meeting, the sabotage by the Sanada Ten Braves, and the Battle of Novgorod.

“...Huh? How much were we cramming into one day?”

Gold Mar: “After saving Ga-chan’s life and flying into a falling floating city, I feel like the main character in an adventure book.”

Me: “Yeah, I feel like I got through it all pretty peacefully though... Oh, but I also think I ended up scoring all my points with guys and old men this time!”

10ZO: “Do old men not count as guys? Anyway, peaceful really is best. I seem to recall getting kicked by an ally while fighting Lord Shibata...”

Silver Wolf: “That was a strategy! A strategy!!”

Scarred: “Hee hee. Lady Mitotsudaira, I will heal you properly later, so could

you prepare by removing all your clothing in one of the medical room's beds? You too, Master Tenzou."

Mal-Ga: "There goes my doujinshi sensor! Today turned out to be a great day after all!!"

83: "It was not a great day. Curry and flour should be made into roux, but it was all wasted."

Sticky King: "Heh. But Noriki managed to make himself useful, so that's good."

Obscene: "That's right! Next time it's our turn to break through the enemy ship's defenses!"

Worshiper: "Wait, is that something we take turns doing...?"

We're as chaotic as ever, thought Asama as Hanami gathered a few pieces of information.

The most important was what they had seen at Novgorod. As part of the Shinto forces, information on the Age of Dawn was of great importance, especially when it involved the previously inviolable Novgorod.

She might get asked to write up a report, but she decided it would be best to make her father the investigator at Kantou IZUMO or Musashi IZUMO. As someone involved in the operation of the Musashi, she could not visit IZUMO or the main Shirasago Shrine so easily. On the other hand, that would mean she could not leave the Musashi for the time being, but...

...What a pain...

She approved the documents Hanami produced. She wondered what had been erased from that relief of the people celebrating something. Also...

...The Double Border Crest...

Why had the Prince of Orange been taken away by that? And what did he mean when he said they tried to become friends with the Princess at an academy Lord Motonobu had made?

Also, why had the crest appeared behind Masazumi and the others? Its disappearance might have been because it had been blocked by the defense

spell she had prepared, but that was another unknown.

“Hmm... Ah, hey! Stop groping me, Kimi.”

“You can’t go get lost in thought all on your own again. ...Discuss it with the rest of us.”

She has a point, thought Asama just before defense barriers appeared across the Musashi.

An emergency alarm sounded and “Musashi” made an announcement.

“A fleet is appearing from secondary stealth above us! It is headed from west-northwest to south. It belongs to...”

It belonged to...

“Hashiba! Over!!”

Futayo looked up to the night sky.

The lingering reverberation of cannon fire seemed to remain in the Musashi as Hashiba’s fleet seemed to look down at them while facing east. They were passing right overhead.

The large ship supporting the front group was the Tottori Castle with its sand barrier.

They apparently had no intent of harming the Musashi.

But the glasses boy seemed to know where they were headed.

“They’re returning to P.A. Oda to resupply before beginning the invasion of Mouri in earnest. Since Date is waiting in Kantou to the north, they can’t send Kantou’s materials to Mouri using the Azuchi Castle. So they’ve chosen to rush over for supplies using the Tottori Castle which functions as an important base in the invasion of Mouri. ...And this doubles as practice for their big return from Mouri.”

“I see,” said Futayo just before the flying Weiss Hexen spoke with a grim note to her voice.

“Hashiba is there!”

Hashiba was looking down at them from the Tottori Castle's port side deck. And...

"Is that Fukushima Masanori and Katou Kiyomasa of the Ten Spears? Also..."

A few other people were visible behind those two. Two of them had multiple sets of wings and held Technohexen *schale besen* that looked like cannons. Meanwhile, back on the Musashi...

"Horizon-sama!?"

Futayo looked directly in front of her.

Horizon was raising Maska Orge. She aimed it at Hashiba overhead, raised her eyebrows, and gained a sharp look in her eyes.

So this is the princess's wrath, thought Futayo.

The transformation was instantaneous.

The face-like grip cover raised its jaw and the absent bowstring was supplied with ether light. But instead of a simple line, it was overheated ether that flickered like a flame.

There were two reasons why Maska Orge was functioning now despite being out of fuel before.

The first was Aspida Phylargia which had activated at the same time.

The second was Toori's ether supply lines which surrounded Horizon like a cape. And...

"Owner: Horizon Ariadust: Confirmed."

"Individual Emotional Expression: Normal Drive – Overdrive: ———: Combat Proof Able: Resolving Self Evolution"

"Individual Emotional Expression: Overdrive: Power: Fully Supplied Externally"

"Horizon-sama: Please Release the Third Safety 'Soul Activation' "

"Judge," confirmed Horizon.

And then she thought, *What is wrath?*

...It is...

She could remember something. It was a past situation much like this one.

At the Battle of Mikatagahara when they had been pursued from Northern Edo to Oushuu, they had faced Hashiba like this. At that time, they had been saved by a great many people.

“...!”

This was a hopeless feeling.

It was an emotion created by loss but different from the one directed at the things that were lost.

If this was wrath, then at whom was it directed?

At Hashiba? Or at herself for being so worthless? Or...

“Horizon, use that wrath to change yourself, okay? Use it to change your somewhat imperfect self so you won’t ever lose again. And to show you’ve done that, fire. And, Horizon, you know who to fire at, don’t you?”

His voice gave her a push forward.

“At those who say we admit we will lose everything if we use this in a predetermined, desperate, or hopeless situation. At those who have forgotten how to resist destiny.”

“...Judge!!”

That cleared my thoughts, realized Horizon. She had held a question in her heart ever since the Battle of Mikatagahara.

“People are a combination of resistance and recovery, of sorrow and joy. But...”

She asked that question.

“When is the right time for us to live and to die!?”

At the very least, her current self desired a certain answer. It was something like the process of elimination. Those who had left had held something in their

hearts: “Resistance against destiny!!”

“ ‘Soul Activation’ Safety Release: Confirmed”

A massive number of sign frames opened around Horizon as she pulled back the bowstring.

The black sign frames were a mixture of crosses and torii. They were initially blank, but a small figure appeared for just a moment and then...

“Logismo Oplo Control OS: Phtonos-01s: Third Stage: Update: Confirmed”

“Welcome to the Genesis of Emotions.”

...What is this?

As if to answer her emotion, the white and black bow grew taut and the string erupted with flame-like light.

“———!!”

Horizon’s voice sounded loudly as she fired Maska Orge toward Hashiba.

The wrath was invisible.

But it flew in a straight line up toward Hashiba who looked down from the deck.

“...!”

It scored a direct hit. Or it looked like it did. However, there was a light.

Right in front of Hashiba and along the path between her and Horizon, light scattered on a large scale.

Ether fragments spread out like an umbrella and hopped across the ship’s surface like sparks, but Hashiba stood perfectly still at the center of that light.

She was unharmed.

Horizon gasped and held Maska Orge tightly in her left hand.

“I can’t believe it...Maska Orge was dragged down to the Muneshige Cannon’s level on the very first shot!”

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige!!”

KageV: “Marfa! Why are you falling to your knees!? Marfa!”

“Hey, Horizon. Why are you doing so much damage to our side?”

“Just to be clear, the Muneshige Cannon blew through an enemy ship the other day. Yes, so it isn’t entirely useless.”

Horizon gave Toori a thumb’s up.

But Urquiaga interrupted while looking above them.

“Hey, look at Hashiba. Do you see what that monkey girl is holding?” He sounded like he doubted his own eyes. “Isn’t that a Logismoi Oplo!?”

Beyond the wind and as they passed each other by, Hashiba finally relaxed.

Wings grew vertically behind her like an iron fan and a single glowing feather grew from them. She also held something in her left arm: “Aspida Phylargia!?”

Fukushima of the Ten Spears heard that question and lightly shook her raised hand to say “no”.

“Well, that’s casual. ...But then what is that!?”

As Asama asked that, Maska Orge’s light finished scattering.

And then the Tottori Castle accelerated. It whipped up the wind as if to say they would be giving no more answers.

“—————”

And it left while Hashiba got up off the deck.

She wobbled a bit, so the others quickly rushed in to support her.

They apparently had their own issues to deal with.

But that was all.

The Tottori Castle reentered stealth and the other ships followed.

They were gone.

Novgorod was no longer in the sky, the Sviet Rus and Mogami fleets had left into the northeastern sky, and Shibata's fleet was moving toward the southern sky. The Musashi alone remained in the chilly sky.

"Um."

Horizon opened her mouth on the academy bridge.

Everyone else was speechless, so she grabbed at Toori's sleeve.

"About Hashiba-sama just now..."

She asked a question.

"Why?" she said. "Why did she have something so Logismoi Oplo-ish?"

"I'm not sure what to say about that '-ish'."

Asama and then everyone else tilted their heads, but then Masazumi spoke up.

"Maybe there are Logis-more of them than we thought..."

Everything completely froze over.

In a white sky, Fukushima sighed while the winds from the surrounding stealth barrier washed over her.

Out of the many coming battles, they were focusing on the history recreation of the invasion of Mouri, so their leader Hashiba had opted to temporarily return in the Tottori Castle.

The Azuchi Castle was still waiting in Edo, but it was stuck there due to the Date clan. On the other hand...

...This is a nearly humiliating waste of time and effort.

This would give Hexagone Française some extra time to prepare. And that may have been why...

Taki: "Yeah, sorry about that, Hashiba group. I'm thinking maybe I should have sent the Shirasagi in to push back Date. What do you think, Fuku?"

First Spear: "N-no, Takigawa. We have no right to criticize thy battlefield

decisions.”

Taki: “Umm, then Hashiba? You there?”

Fukushima grabbed the *lernen figur* displaying Takigawa and pointed it toward Hashiba. But...

Taki: “Hashibaaaa?”

As Takigawa called out to her, Hashiba crouched down by the deck railing and grabbed her hood as if holding her head in her hands.

“...”

Seeing the silent and unmoving Hashiba, Takigawa asked Fukushima a question.

Taki: “What’s she doing?”

“Testament,” began Fukushima.

First Spear: “She is feeling shy after everyone saw such an uncool side of her.”

Last Chapter: Residents of a New Place

最終章

『新しき場所の宿り者達』

身軽になったと
そう思って
私達はまた抱えに行く
配点（誕生）



We feel

That we are lighter

And we once more carry our burden forward

Point Allocation (Birth)

The Battle of Novgorod was over. After waiting for the arrival of the Sviet Rus security fleet and the fleet to collect the fallen Novgorod, the Musashi returned to the Ariake in normal cruising.

They did not use stealth cruising. Sviet Rus, Mogami, and Date each sent a fleet to protect them for a leg of the journey, so they returned as something like celebrated victors.

But as the light of midmorning washed over the Musashi, the officers were gathered in the student council room on the front of the academy's 3rd floor. They were arranging the desks and shelves while speaking with the others who had arrived to help.

The most movement came from Naito and Naruze whose wings allowed them to carry things out of the windows. They also worked in the delivery industry, so they could chat while they carried things out or back in.

"Aren't our finals coming up soon?"

"And after the excitement over Adele's testing, I seem to recall something about our class trip being canceled..."

"Do you want to go on the class trip, Ga-chan?"

"It's sure to give me plenty of doujinshi material, right?"

"That's right," agreed Adele. She lowered her eyebrows and sighed. "I went all out on the retest, so it should be fine. You can look forward to the trip."

"I'm a little afraid that going all out means leaving the category of human..."

"I am also feeling something that I believe is called 'looking forward to' the class trip," said Horizon. "I have few memories of spending much time with everyone."

Horizon was by the window. She had lined up her desk next to Toori's and she plotting out a way to place Masazumi's, Mitotsudaira's, Asama's, and Kimi's adjacent to it as well. She stopped to take a breath and cross her arms.

"But this student council room feels more like your school socialization room. ...The only difference from Class Plum's classroom is the presence of Yoshiyasu-sama and Ookubo-sama's desks, so should I assume things will be even livelier in here?"

"Heh heh. That's right. When we're at the academy, we'll probably choose either here or on the bridge. And outside the academy, we'll probably choose either the Blue Thunder or *our place*."

Kimi poked her head out through the white cloth of the curtain divider she was checking on.

But she suddenly followed Horizon's gaze. Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Suzu also turned around to see the idiot in a summer uniform.

He had attached something to that uniform: a thin chain.

It was just the one, but he had made it by connecting a few shorter chains together.

No one asked him what it meant, but Horizon did nod and speak.

"Did you think immersing yourself in the past would make you look cool, Toori-sama?"

"Dammit! You had to point that out, didn't you!? You aren't going to let me take anything seriously, are you!?"

The others worked to calm the idiot down and Horizon took a breath.

"A lot has happened, but if I were to sum it all up..."

She made sure to begin with "for now".

"We have finished resisting and have somewhat managed to recover. But does that assumption qualify as the deadly sin of vainglory?"

Asama nodded at Horizon's words.

She held a sign frame from “Musashi” with a message asking Masazumi whether or not they would return to the Ariake. Asama forwarded it to Masazumi and spoke to the others with a smile.

“I think our trip to Novgorod worked well as a test flight toward recovery.”

“Judge. ...You got to shoot some, didn’t you? But four shots in a row? Maybe you were bottling it up too much...”

“T-Toori-kun, don’t describe my covering fire for Masa like that.”

As the others gave Asama weird looks, Masazumi raised a hand after checking a few things on a sign frame.

“Hey, everyone. The Musashi has started on its route back to the Ariake. We’ll be there in half a day. Don’t forget that we’ll have to fine-tune the Musashi’s parts, correct any deficiencies found in the data we collected, and prepare for what happens next. Speaking of what happens next...”

“Judge,” said Neshinbara while opening several sign frames. “If we’re going to pursue Hashiba’s actions, we’ll be assisting Mouri. If not, we’ll be liberating Kantou. I think we can use the attack on Houjou to lead into Matsudaira’s control of Kantou.”

Everyone looked to Noriki when they heard the mention of Houjou. Naruze stuck her head in through the window and began groping empty air with both hands.

“Will you be okay?” she asked Noriki.

“What are those hands for? Besides, I’m a resident of Musashi and nothing more.”

“As Treasurer, I would like to suggest the attack on Houjou,” said Shirojiro. “If we can control Kantou, we could build up a large (albeit insular) field of commerce. That would be an excellent choice for gaining a foothold and some backup.”

“I see,” replied everyone.

Naomasa walked in carrying five buckets of water with her false arm and she looked around.

“Where’s Urquiaga? Is he not helping?”

“Urquiaga-kun took Narumi-san to Takao so they could find a home,” said Heidi.

“Hmm,” replied everyone.

A sign frame appeared by the top of the student council room window. It displayed Ookubo and Kanou.

Ookubo reported on the results and various problems found during the Musashi’s outing.

Kanou displayed diagrams of their course and of the battle to assist in the explanation. And afterwards...

“The biggest result was repairing the relationship between the three nations of Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus. And we have received an assurance of their cooperation, which addresses our biggest concern during the special student general assembly. With this...” Ookubo looked directly out of the screen at them. “Musashi has settled on the policy put forward by the current Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers. The Committee Union will follow your lead. Musashi will now work to stop Hashiba while attempting to stop the Apocalypse by seeking the Logismoi Oplo and negotiating with the other nations. We will do our best to assist you.”

Kanou bowed and raised her head to reveal a smile. There was no tension in it and Asama felt it was entirely unplanned. *Good, nothing is out of place.*

“I’m sure you already know this, but I’m bringing Unturning Centipede and you with me. Not many places are going to work for that. Should we try to find a way to rent a place on the surface?”

“Do not say you are bringing me. I am a man of mystery who always slips through your fingers.”

“Is that supposed to be a joke?”

Narumi and Urquiaga were walking through the Kabe wide block in underground Oume. They had requested a place near the adjacent long block,

so they did not have to walk far.

They compared the key they held to the room numbers.

“Oh, we just passed it. But this room...”

“It was originally a storeroom for the wide block’s materials,” explained Urquiaga. “That means the door is nice and big, so that’s a good start...”

They unlocked the door, opened it, and were met by the scent of flour.

The room was nearly 10 square meters. The floor was made of stone and the room was entirely empty without even a bed. However...

“Perhaps we should look at it as being able to make it however we like.”

“I would like a poison testing room to help out Toori.”

“As long as you’ll respond when I talk to you, that’s fine with me.”

“I quite like your lack of tension...”

Narumi just about replied with an exasperated “testament”, but caught herself and said “judge” instead. Then she lightly grabbed the entrance column and checked its strength. It seemed solid enough. So...

...I like this place.

She turned around to say that out loud, but she found the half-dragon was already reinforcing a corner of the room with spells. *He just does whatever he wants, doesn’t he?* she thought and she started to smile.

“—————”

“What is it?”

She only managed to get an “eh?” out of her throat.

Then she breathed in and let her senses spread to her surroundings. They were the only ones in the vicinity. The men were out working and the women were doing laundry or cooking where the water was. And at the edge of the wide block, no one would be watching them.

“How should I put it? When I was at Date, I wanted to leave.”

But...

“When we drove back the Seiryu, I was resisting along with the others. And...”

“And?”

“Judge,” she replied. That was a sinner’s response and so she continued as if to carve the word into herself. “I feel like I shouldn’t have been trying to escape that place alone. Everyone was desperately trying to preserve and lift up the Date clan, so I shouldn’t have been thinking about fulfilling my role and then running away...”

“Your role was something only you could have done, so rest easy.”

“But...if I hadn’t told her to do that, Masamune wouldn’t have suffered so much.”

“That is probably true.”

He admitted that. But...

“That is why I am sure Masamune is glad that she did not have you do it instead.”

“I can’t just avoid facing the problem like that...”

“It all works out if you view it as Masamune choosing to protect you there. You...no, Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus all used your promise as an excuse to fear who would be the most harmed and to try to keep anyone from worrying about you. If you are to resist that, you cannot just deny it outright. Both sides caused trouble for the other and so you are both judged. Viewing it like that would be about right.”

“You’re really looking down on us with that judgment.”

“Judge. I am the 2nd Special Duty Officer and my name comes from Naitou Kiyonari, head of the magistrates during Matsudaira’s rule.” He kept his back turn as he worked. “So when you must make a decision that comes with troublesome feelings, you can listen to my decision. You might not agree, but you can force that onto me and lighten the burden on yourself. After all, I can shove things onto Toori when they get too troublesome.”

“Won’t that increase the burden on your Chancellor?”

“We make up for it with our results. The idiot has his burdens, we have ours,

and we all have something to accomplish. ...It's a mutual exchange. No single side is entirely unhappy or happy. You cannot simultaneously emphasize emotions and results without allowing a mutual exchange of the benefits and the burdens. So we will make up for the idiot's burden with the results we bring back to him."

He scratched his head.

"Yes, and then we can smile together and slap each other's shoulders."

"That's how boys do things. What about the girls?"

"I am not a girl, so I wouldn't know."

"That is an impressive lack of reliability."

But...

"Narumi. ...I want you to trust me about one thing."

"...About what?"

"Let us say you had always lived in a destiny that was very convenient for you. Full of happiness and full of dreams. That kind of crazy destiny."

"Judge. And?"

"Judge. Even in that case, you would still be here. I would have taken you with me."

"————"

Narumi was at a loss for words. And after breathing for a few seconds...

"W-wait. I need to go buy some drinks."

She somehow managed to get her trembling mouth moving and held her lips with her hand as she stepped out into the corridor.

Narumi jogged over to the end of the wide block.

A few small shops were located there. She turned the corner to hide herself from where he was and finally came to a stop.

...What am I supposed to do about this?

She was not confident she could answer that feeling of his in kind. She was still dragging around her past and even if she did cleanse herself of that...

“How am I supposed to believe I would have come here no matter what?”

I'm really not used to this sort of thing, she realized. *This is pathetic*, Date Vice Chancellor, she told herself with a bitter laugh.

“But.”

Would this solve itself with time? Summer break was coming up before long. The second term would begin after that and Date would be changing the rhythm of their lifestyle by then. By that point, would the traces of that have faded inside her and would these worries lose all meaning?

...The second term.

It seemed so far off yet so close. But the word “September” reminded her of him.

When he had given her some underwear in the main garden, he had told her his birthday was September 7.

Her birthday was in June, so that meant he was younger than her. He had used that reasoning to nonsensically claim she would be his elder sister if they got married.

But once that day arrived and they were the same age, would her feelings and her connection to Date have changed?

I hope so, she thought as she looked up to see not the café but the small clothing store next to it.

It was selling men's underwear hanging from the wall. She considered giving him some for his birthday as a reversal of the main garden incident.

“Huh? Narumi? ...We'll be resuming classes once we get to the Ariake, so I look forward to seeing you there.”

A woman teacher in a track suit left the nearby café with a paper bag full of fried chicken. She wore a sword on her back and she looked to the shop Narumi was facing.

“Men’s? Do you prefer that kind?”

“No, I don’t. ...I was thinking of buying some as a birthday present for Kiyonari.”

“Ah ha ha. As a prank? But you’re really planning ahead.”

“Really? It doesn’t seem that far away...”

“It doesn’t? May of next year is still a long way off.”

“...Huh?”

The teacher tilted her head at Narumi’s confusion.

“Did you have the date wrong? Urquiaga’s birthday is in May. That was while we were traveling from England to IZUMO. Since he’s Catholic, we burned a bunch of the scrap materials, cooked meat over it, and pretended to burn people at the stake.”

Narumi laughed.

The teacher looked confused, so she raised a hand to say “don’t worry about me” and let out the laughter she could not hold back any longer.

...That idiot!!

He really was an idiot. Holy men were not supposed to lie. And it was a lie that would obviously come to light later on. He had said he had seen her birthday in the almanac, but he must have thought up that lie on the spot in the main garden.

How much had he wanted her? But...

“Thank you, sensei. ...You’ve put my mind at ease.”

“Sure thing. I don’t know what I did, so I’ll just leave it at ‘judge’.”

“Judge,” replied Narumi as she bowed and turned around.

Judge. That’s right. A sinner’s response. It’s perfect for a liar. So I need to use it myself from now on.

And she began to walk to her new home.

.../...

She thought about him. About that half-dragon who was undoubtedly an idiot.

He was an idiot. He was a truly idiotic person who would readily lie.

But I love that idiot.

There's no point in fearing these feelings, she realized. I don't need to worry or think negatively about the fact that he loves me or that I love him.

After all, he would accept any of her burdens.

She did not have to respond to his feelings in kind because they were already mutual. She just had to tell him how she felt. It was mutual. It was a cycle. The Ouroboros loop created by two dragons was a symbol of eternity. So it was not the quantity of their feelings that mattered; it was how much importance they placed on the feelings they sent out.

She would make sure to leave him with the burden of her love. And with that, the burden would accelerate them, would lighten them, and would lead them to real results. And for placing that burden on him...

...I just have to make sure we're happy together.

There were probably also some "girly" ways for her to do that.

So she would cook. And sew and clean. There were a lot of girls on the Musashi. She would probably enjoy talking with them. And so she would support their happiness to make up for burdening him with her love.

Their relationship with their Chancellor was probably the same.

It had also been the same with the Date clan, Masamune, and the others.

"That's right."

She loved Date, but she could not place that burden on them right now.

But she had someone here who would accept that burden in their stead. And he always would.

"Kiyonari."

His birthday is September 7, she told herself as she arrived at their new home and peered inside. She found him setting down a table he had carried in from somewhere. When he looked back at her...

“Did you buy the drinks? Then let us take a break.”

“Eh? Oh...”

She had said she was going to buy drinks, but she had come back emptyhanded. He seemed to have noticed, but she spoke up before he could say anything.

“I don’t know what you like.”

So...

“Let’s go together this time. We’ll probably be busy with the fight against Hashiba and everything else, so I want to know more about the Musashi and about your preferences.”

“You’re in quite a good mood.”

She could only agree with a ‘judge’. When he walked up to her, she placed herself by his side.

“I put up a resistance and I recovered. ...So I’ve decided I’m going to go someplace new. And I’ll let an idiot guide me there.”



忘れないとも……



We will not forget it...

Afterword

And there you have Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 4-C. This brings the Oushuu and Jouetsu story to an end. Starting next time, the story will lead to a confrontation, an invasion, and a counterattack.

It was mentioned in the novel itself, but in this time period of Japanese history, the daimyos often ran into the problem of gaining and then losing land.

That's because Ieyasu introduced the rule about one castle per feudal domain and the rules about the extinction of clans in his Laws of the Military Houses, but ironically enough, clans supported by Ieyasu ended up with no heir and thus qualified for extinction under his rules.

Mogami is one clan that got hit by that inconvenience. Since it happened near the beginning of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Ushuu (the Sea of Japan side of Tohoku) became a political blank zone. But that allowed it to develop as a region of production and to get through the Meiji Restoration relatively peacefully.

Japan's current distribution of politicians is influenced a lot by whether one leaves a family behind or not, an idea that has its roots in the era we're looking at here. With that in mind, history seems a lot more continuous and not so much divided up into distinct eras.

Now for the chat.

"It really doesn't matter anymore, but do you have any stupid stories? One from your school days would be good."

"When I was in elementary school, firecrackers were really popular."

"This is sounding dangerous already."

"Yeah, and y'know those missile-style ones? Where you stick the powder in the tip and throw it so it'll go 'bang!' on the ground? Well, we were doing those

in the classroom and I threw one out the window.”

“And?”

“When I looked down from the 3rd floor, I saw Takei (pseudonym) lying sprawled out on the ground. It looked pretty bad, so I made sure to get rid of the evidence. Elementary school me really did hide the evidence.”

“You wouldn’t be able to hide the victim’s memories.”

“Yeah, that’s always a problem.”

You run into it often? But I wonder if they still sell those gunpowder toys these days.

Now, my work background music this time was ‘Taiyou no Mannaka he’ by Bivattchee. No matter how difficult or sad things get, I want to always carry a song like that inside me.

Anyway...

“Who sought their promise the most?”

And with that, wait a bit until the next one.

October 2011. A sunny morning even though they said it would rain.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Rusu means “away from home”.
2. ↑ Ane means ‘elder sister’.
3. ↑ Itachi and Saijou are incorrect readings of the kanji for Date and Mogami.
4. ↑ Hanchou is an incorrect reading of the kanji for Shigenaga.
5. ↑ Mori means forest and the Naga of Nagayoshi means long.
6. ↑ Mara is a Buddhist demon which is also used as a slang term for the penis in Japanese.